

S. P. TRAPEZNIKOV

LENINISM  
AND  
THE AGRARIAN  
AND PEASANT  
QUESTION

VOLUME I



S. P. TRAPEZNIKOV

LENINISM  
AND  
THE AGRARIAN  
AND PEASANT  
QUESTION

IN TWO VOLUMES



*Progress Publishers*

*Moscow*

S. P. TRAPEZNIKOV

LENIN'S  
AGRARIAN  
PROGRAMMES  
FOR THE THREE  
RUSSIAN  
REVOLUTIONS  
VOLUME I



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## CONTENTS

In Lieu of an Introduction by Academician <i>I. I. Mints</i> and Academician <i>P. N. Pospelov</i>	11
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### **PART I. RUSSIA ON THE EVE OF PROFOUND REVOLUTIONARY UPHEAVALS**

<i>Chapter I. THE BEGINNING OF THE LENINIST STAGE IN SCIENTIFIC ELABORATION OF THE AGRARIAN AND PEASANT PROBLEM</i>	21
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

- |                                                                                                      |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Specific Historical Features of Russia's Agrarian Development and Reasons for Its Backwardness    | 27 |
| 2. The Evolution of Landlord and Peasant Farming in the Direction of Capitalist Development          | 34 |
| 3. The Stratification of the Peasantry and the Emergence of New Social Types in the Rural Population | 45 |

<i>Chapter II THE INFLUENCE OF MARXISM IN AWAKENING THE REVOLUTIONARY-DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA</i>	53
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

- |                                                                                                                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Advanced Social Thought: the Leading Force in Economic and Social Progress                                                         | 53 |
| 2. The Progressive Character of the Revolutionary Narodniks' Agrarian Views and the Reactionary Nature of Their Successors            | 60 |
| A. The Agrarian Theories of the Revolutionary Narodniks and Their Historical Role in the Progressive Development of Russia            | 61 |
| B. The Evolution of the Revolutionary Democracy of the Narodniks and Their Transformation into Ideologists of the Peasant Bourgeoisie | 68 |
| 3. Marxist Criticism of the Agrarian Theories of the Narodniks and the "Legal Marxists"                                               | 74 |

<i>Chapter III. THEORETICAL ELABORATION OF THE FIRST MARXIST AGRARIAN PROGRAMME AND ITS ADOPTION AT THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE RSDLP</i>	82
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

1. Leninist Substantiation of the Revolutionary Strategy and Tactics of the RSDLP Towards the Peasantry . . . . .	82
2. The Programme Demands of the Second Congress of the RSDLP in the Area of Agrarian Reforms . . . . .	88
3. Lenin's Assessment of the First Agrarian Programme . . . . .	97

## **PART II. THE AGRARIAN AND PEASANT QUESTION DURING THE TWO STAGES OF THE BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA**

### **Chapter IV. THE AGRARIAN QUESTION AND THE AGRARIAN PROGRAMMES OF POLITICAL PARTIES DURING THE FIRST RUSSIAN REVOLUTION . . . . . 107**

1. The Deep Agrarian Crisis and the Impoverishment of the Russian Village . . . . .	107
2. The Upsurge of the Peasant Revolutionary Movement . . . . .	112
3. The Agrarian Measures of the Government and Its Search for Ways of Achieving a New Agrarian Reform . . . . .	118
4. The Agrarian Policy and the Tactics of the Bourgeois-Monarchist Parties . . . . .	122
5. Petty-Bourgeois Parties and Their Revolutionary-Democratic Agrarian Demands . . . . .	127
6. The Leninist Course on Joining the Peasant Movement with the Revolutionary Struggle of the Working Class . . . . .	134

### **Chapter V. LENIN'S SECOND AGRARIAN PROGRAMME OF THE RSDLP FOR A BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONS . . . . . 143**

1. The Pressing Need to Revise the First Agrarian Programme . . . . .	143
2. The Theoretical and Political Basis of Lenin's Second Agrarian Programme . . . . .	149
3. The Nationalisation of Land as the Principal Point of Lenin's Agrarian Programme . . . . .	157
4. The Reformist Nature of the Menshevik Agrarian Programme of Municipalisation . . . . .	163
5. The Revolutionary-Democratic Nature of the Agrarian Programme of Land Division . . . . .	170
6. The Agrarian Question as the Central Issue of the Inner-Party Struggle at the Fourth Congress of the RSDLP . . . . .	176

<b>Chapter VI. THE SECOND LANDOWNER AGRARIAN REFORM— AGAIN PLUNDER AND ENSLAVEMENT . . . . .</b>	<b>182</b>
1. The Political and Socio-Economic Aims of the Stolypin Agrarian Reform . . . . .	182
<i>A. Forcible Destruction of the Peasant Commune . . . . .</i>	<i>184</i>
<i>B. Setting Up the Individual Farmstead and Holding System of             Landownership . . . . .</i>	<i>187</i>
2. The Peasant Bank—the Main Lever of Stolypin's Agrarian Policy . . . . .	192
3. Stolypin's Resettlement Policy and the Results of the Cul- tivation of Eastern Lands . . . . .	200
4. The Reasons Behind the Collapse of the Stolypin Plan for Land Use . . . . .	206
<i>A. The Consequences of the Stolypin Government's Anti-Commune             Measures . . . . .</i>	<i>207</i>
<i>B. The Barrenness of the Stolypin Farmstead and Holding System of             Landownership . . . . .</i>	<i>210</i>
5. The Influence of the First Russian Revolution on the Develop- ment of Russia's Agricultural Productive Forces . . . . .	213
 <b>Chapter VII. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVE- MENT IN RUSSIA, A MAJOR STEP TOWARDS ESTABLISH- MENT OF BOURGEOIS RELATIONS IN RURAL AREAS . . .</b>	 <b>220</b>
1. Marx on the Historical Paths of the Development of Co-opera- tion . . . . .	220
2. The Historical Roots of Bourgeois Co-operation . . . . .	225
3. Agricultural Artels in Russia and Their Specific Features . . .	233
4. The Rise of the Co-operative Movement in Russia After the First Revolution . . . . .	237
5. Lenin's Fight Against Reformism in the Co-operative Move- ment . . . . .	242
 <b>Chapter VIII. THE AGRARIAN QUESTION DURING THE FIRST WORLD IMPERIALIST WAR AND THE SECOND BOURGEOIS- DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION . . . . .</b>	 <b>250</b>
1. Collapse of the Peasant Economy During the World War . . .	250
<i>A. Huge Loss of Productive Manpower in Rural Areas . . .</i>	<i>250</i>
<i>B. Collapse of the Agricultural Economy and Food Supplies . . .</i>	<i>254</i>

<i>C. Disorganisation of the Home Market and Destruction of World Economic Ties—Their Disastrous Effect On Russia's Agriculture . . . . .</i>	256
2. The Second Bourgeois-Democratic Revolution in Russia. The "Sacred" Alliance Between the Bourgeoisie, Landowners and Right-wing Socialists Against the Interests of the People	260
 <b>PART III THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE GREAT AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION IN RUSSIA</b>	
<b>Chapter IX. THE PARTY'S POLICY OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE ADOPTION OF THE BOLSHEVIKS' <u>NEW AGRARIAN</u> PROGRAMME . . . . .</b>	269
1. Correctness of Lenin's Theory on the Bourgeois-Democratic Revolution Growing into Socialist Revolution Tested by History	269
2. Lenin's Agrarian Programme at the Stage of Socialist Revolution	275
<i>A. Immediate Confiscation of the Large Estates and Nationalisation of All Land . . . . .</i>	277
<i>B. Organisation of the Rural Proletariat into an Independent Class Force . . . . .</i>	282
<i>C. Theoretical Reasons for Setting up Two Types of Socialised Enterprise in Agriculture . . . . .</i>	287
3. Bankruptcy of the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary Agrarian Policy . . . . .	292
<i>A. The Mensheviks as Allies of the Constitutional-Democrats and Defenders of the Landlords . . . . .</i>	293
<i>B. The Narodnik Parties Assume the Agrarian Positions of the Mensheviks and Constitutional-Democrats . . . . .</i>	297
<b>Chapter X. THE AGRARIAN MOVEMENT BECOMES A REVOLUTIONARY PEASANT WAR AND MERGES WITH THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION . . . . .</b>	304
1. Formation of Revolutionary Forces in the Rural Areas and Growth of the Political Activity of the Peasant Masses . . .	304
2. Growth of the Mass Agrarian Movement in the Countryside and Development of Two Trends in the Peasant Struggle	307
3. The Bolsheviks' New Tactics Against the Socialist-Revolutionaries . . . . .	312

4. The Proletariat Wins Political Power—the Key to the Agrarian Question in Russia . . . . .	316
5. The Great Agrarian Revolution Approaches . . . . .	321
<i>Chapter XI. THE GREAT AGRARIAN REVOLUTION AND THE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN RUSSIA'S AGRARIAN SYSTEM</i> . . . . .	330
1. The Transformative Power of the First Agrarian Laws Passed by the Soviet Government . . . . .	330
2. Land Nationalisation—the Decisive Condition for the Development of Agriculture Along the New, Socialist Path . . . . .	338
3. Abolition of the Big Estates and Formation of a Small-Scale Peasant Economy in the Rural Areas . . . . .	343
4. Division of the Big Estates—an Essential Condition for Winning the Peasantry Over to the Socialist Revolution . . . . .	350
5. Predominance of the Petty-Bourgeois Peasant Economy and the Leninist Principles of Socialist Farming . . . . .	356
6. Regeneration of the Communal Form of Land Use . . . . .	363
<i>Chapter XII. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION IN THE RURAL AREAS. RALLYING OF THE WORKING MASSES OF THE PEASANTRY AROUND THE WORKING CLASS</i> . . . . .	369
1. Demarcation of Class Forces Among the Peasantry and Intensification of the Class Struggle in the Village . . . . .	369
2. The Poor Peasants as the Political Bulwark of Soviet Power in the Countryside . . . . .	376
3. Theoretical Reasons for the Party's Third Slogan on the Peasant Question . . . . .	383
4. The Party Moves on from a Policy of Neutralisation to a Policy of Firm Alliance with the Middle Peasants . . . . .	388
5. The Civil War and the Party's Agrarian Policy in the Period of War Communism . . . . .	394
<i>Chapter XIII. THE GREAT OCTOBER SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW SOCIALIST FORMS OF ECONOMY IN AGRICULTURE</i> . . . . .	401
1. Historical Pre-conditions for a Socialised Economy in Agriculture . . . . .	401
2. The State Farms as Strongpoints of Socialist Agriculture . . . . .	408
3. Emergence of Collective Associations of Peasants as the First Shoots of Socialism in the Countryside . . . . .	413

**PART IV. THE SOVIET PEASANTRY IN THE FIRST STAGE OF THE  
TRANSITIONAL PERIOD FROM CAPITALISM TO SOCIALISM**

<b>Chapter XIV. THE PARTY'S AGRARIAN POLICY DURING THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE . . . . .</b>	<b>423</b>
1. Transition to NEP—a Sharp Turn in Party's Economic Policy	423
<i>A. Establishing Economic Relations Between the Working Class             and the Peasantry to Suit the Transitional Period from             Capitalism to Socialism . . . . .</i>	<i>426</i>
<i>B. Regrouping Class Forces and Preparing for Socialism's All-             Out Offensive . . . . .</i>	<i>432</i>
2. Raising the Productive Forces of Agriculture as an Important Link in the Chain of Economic Construction . . . . .	438
3. The Land Code: the Final Stage in Revolutionary Agrarian Changes	445
<b>Chapter XV. DEVELOPING SOCIALISED FARMING DURING THE FIRST PERIOD OF NEP . . . . .</b>	<b>452</b>
1. Party Policy of Promoting Co-operatives . . . . .	452
<i>A. Increasing the Role of Consumer Co-operatives . . . . .</i>	<i>455</i>
<i>B. Developing Agricultural and Credit Co-operatives . . . . .</i>	<i>460</i>
2. Strength of the Collective Farm System . . . . .	468
3. Surmounting the Difficulties in Sovkhoz Construction . . . . .	475
<b>Chapter XVI. STRENGTHENING THE ALLIANCE OF THE WORK- ING CLASS AND THE PEASANTRY AS THE MAIN CON- DITION FOR THE SOCIALIST DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE . . . . .</b>	<b>480</b>
1. The Efficacy of Lenin's Principles of Farm Management and Decisive Shifts in Soviet Agriculture . . . . .	480
2. The New Alignment of Class Forces and the Class Strug- gle in the Countryside . . . . .	486
3. Price Imbalances and Sales Difficulties for Agricultural Pro- ducts. Party Measures to Reinforce the Link Between Town and Countryside . . . . .	493
4. Strengthening the Alliance with the Middle Peasant and Organising the Poor Peasant. Major Successes of the Party's Agrarian Policy . . . . .	500
5. Fourteenth Party Congress. End of the First Stage of the Transitional Period. The Party's Policy of Industrialising the Country. . . . .	506
Name Index . . . . .	515

## IN LIEU OF AN INTRODUCTION

*Leninism and the Agrarian and Peasant Question* by Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences S. P. Trapeznikov is the product of many years of work. This two-volume monograph represents a comprehensive study of what has been done in the USSR and the socialist countries to solve the agrarian and peasant question and the methods employed to this end.

In order to demonstrate the immediate relevance of S. P. Trapeznikov's work it is sufficient to cite the fact that hundreds of millions of peasants—the majority of mankind—are seeking, both in countries where capital rules and in countries which have liberated themselves politically from the dictatorship of the imperialists, but which are still experiencing economic oppression, a means of moving towards a free, flourishing system where all forms of exploitation are alien.

S. P. Trapeznikov's monograph, which describes the historical experience of solving the agrarian and peasant question in the USSR, where the predatory law of capitalism that doomed the majority of peasants to impoverishment, hunger and immense sacrifices and deprivations was first abolished, provides a practical political answer to the question asked by enormous mass of peasants.

The monograph throws light on the agrarian problem and its solution by the Party at various stages of Soviet history in a broad social context and in close connection with all the other issues of social development.

The author has drawn upon a wealth of documentary material in writing this work and made use of numerous studies by Soviet scholars of various aspects of the history of agrarian relations.

In this book S. P. Trapeznikov presents a generalised, inte-

grated study embracing an immense period of the Soviet Union's agrarian history, from the peasant reforms of 1861 to the agrarian policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at the contemporary stage. The author traces throughout this period the theoretical initiative of Lenin, his contribution to the science and practice of revolutionary solution of the agrarian and peasant question and the development by the Party of Lenin's teaching in new historical conditions up to the latter's full realisation. S. P. Trapeznikov adheres unwaveringly to Lenin's instruction to examine the agrarian problem in an international context rather than within a limited national framework, constantly showing that basic patterns inevitably repeat themselves in all countries which are building socialism.

The author has shown for the first time convincingly, profoundly and on the basis of an immense volume of practical data the Leninist stage in the development of Marxism in relation to the agrarian and peasant question.

The founders of Marxism attached enormous importance to the revolutionary role of the peasantry. The works of Marx and Engels contain numerous statements that the peasantry, because of the growth of capitalism in the country, was by no means a reserve for the bourgeoisie. Drawing on the experience of the 1848 revolution Marx wrote in his renowned work *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "The interests of the peasants, therefore, are no longer, as under Napoleon, in accord with, but in opposition to the interests of the bourgeoisie, to capital. Hence the peasants find their natural ally and leader in the urban proletariat, whose task is the overthrow of the bourgeois order".<sup>1</sup> With the same lack of ambiguity the founders of Marxism stated that the victory of the revolution was assured if it depended upon an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. "The whole thing in Germany will depend on the possibility of backing the proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasant War. Then the affair will be splendid."<sup>2</sup> Marx wrote in 1856, stressing the importance of an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry.

Lenin cited these brilliant pronouncements on more than one occasion, generalising, systematising and developing them further in the new conditions created by imperialism. S. P. Trapeznikov

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, Moscow, 1978, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1975, p. 86.



reveals in detail the rich Leninist ideological heritage on the agrarian and peasant problem. Lenin was the first Marxist to apply Marxism to the concrete conditions of Russia, thereby developing this great teaching further.

In this work the author shows Lenin as a scholar who comprehensively studied the history of agrarian relations in Russia, revealed the essence of the social and economic processes which took place in the countryside after the abolition of serfdom and elicited the role and place of the peasantry in achieving general democratic and socialist objectives. In the course of the struggle against the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks Lenin created the agrarian programme of the Bolsheviks, which rested on a profound theoretical foundation and fully corresponded to the interests of the toiling peasants and the growth of the revolutionary movement.

The author has been able to show Lenin's theoretical views on the agrarian question in the dynamic process of their development and in organic connection with the practical revolutionary struggle and the historical experience of the peasant movement in Russia. The work shows the outstanding contribution of Lenin to elaborating the revolutionary strategy and tactics of the proletariat in relation to the peasantry and to defining the latter's role and place in the revolutionary struggle against autocracy and capitalism.

Profound analysis of social and economic processes in the countryside have enabled the author to uncover the social stratification of the peasantry. Lenin was the first Russian Marxist creatively to develop the ideas of Marx and Engels on an alliance between the working class and the peasantry into an integral doctrine and to elucidate the problem of the disposition of class forces at different stages of the revolutionary movement. Lenin posed anew the question of the motive forces of bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions under the conditions of a new historical era – the era of imperialism.

In his book S. P. Trapeznikov convincingly shows how Lenin, in creatively developing the tenets of Marx and Engels on an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry and the hegemony of the proletariat, elucidated the disposition of class forces at different stages of the revolutionary movement. Lenin's conclusion that, at the democratic stage, the proletariat acts in alliance with the entire peasantry, while in a socialist revolution it acts in alliance with the proletarian and semi-proletarian strata of the rural population, formed the basis of Bolshevik strategy and tactics. The author correctly notes the key importance of Lenin's sub-

stantiation of the slogan concerning the disposition of class forces after the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution: in the struggle for socialism the working class relies firmly on the poor peasants and strengthens its alliance with the middle masses of the peasantry struggling against the kulaks.

A notable element of this section of S. P. Trapeznikov's book is its searching analysis of Lenin's ideological heritage in the sphere of agrarian relations under Soviet conditions and its detailed description of Lenin's brilliant cooperative plan—a militant programme for socialist reform of agriculture in the Soviet Union. The author examines on a high theoretical and scholarly level a broad range of issues raised and elaborated by Lenin in connection with the peasant problem as a constituent part of the general plan for building socialism in the USSR.

Lenin's programme for socialist reform of agriculture is shown to be a scientifically-grounded complex of social, economic and political measures, implementation of which ensured the gradual transition of the many millions of peasants to socialism. On the basis of study of Lenin's works and Party documents, the author reveals the objective necessity for transition from petty individual holdings to large-scale collective agricultural production.

Special note should be taken of the fact that, as this work emphasises, in studying the practical conditions of solving the agrarian question, Lenin proceeded from the specific features of its development in Russia. The author has been most successful in showing that Lenin did not ignore variety or exaggerate specific features and did not counterpose them to general development, but showed, over and above all national differences, the overall path of historical development of agrarian relations.

S. P. Trapeznikov's work vividly reveals the legitimate pride with which Lenin spoke of the international importance of theoretical and practical work to establish and consolidate an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry: "This task which we are working on now, for the time being on our own, seems to be a purely Russian one, but in reality it is a task which all socialists will face. Capitalism is dying; in its death throes it can still condemn tens and hundreds of millions of people to unparalleled torment, but there is no power that can prevent its collapse. The new society, which will be based on the alliance of the workers and peasants, is inevitable".<sup>1</sup> Lenin's prophetic words became reality:

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Ninth All-Russia Congress of Soviets", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, Moscow, 1966, p. 177.

an alliance between the proletariat and the toiling peasantry represents the general pattern of development in the socialist countries.

Profound and careful analysis of *continuity* in the development of Lenin's teaching on the agrarian and peasant question is a very important issue raised and resolved in S. P. Trapeznikov's work. Throughout the entire course of its activity the Communist Party has been unwaveringly guided by the great ideas of Lenin. It has preserved the Leninist heritage and upheld his teaching in the struggle against opponents acting within and without the Party.

However, as Lenin said, "guarding the heritage does not mean confining oneself to the heritage."<sup>1</sup> While devoting many pages of his work to the subject of how the Party has preserved and upheld Lenin's heritage and protected it against any attempts at distortion, S. P. Trapeznikov is primarily concerned to present the historical development of the theory on the agrarian and peasant problem in Lenin's works and Party documents. This problem, in view of the exceptional complexity of its solution on the theoretical and, especially, the practical planes, has been comprehensively examined in essence at every Party congress and at many plenary sessions of the CPSU Central Committee. The author describes in detail the collective elaboration of the political line by the Party at congresses and the concrete expression given this policy at plenary sessions of the Central Committee. The work elucidates with great thoroughness the decisions of the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th congresses of the Party, at which the problems of socialist reform of agriculture were addressed. All these decisions rested upon Lenin's co-operative plan and represented a creative development of Lenin's ideas in conformity with the concrete historical situation and the practical requirements of socialist construction.

In this new edition of S. P. Trapeznikov's work the section dealing with measures elaborated by the 23rd congress of the CPSU on the Party's agrarian policy has been expanded and a new chapter analysing the decisions of the 24th, 25th and 26th congresses of the Party and of plenary sessions of the CPSU Central Committee on further expanding agricultural production and raising of its efficiency has been included.

The author has shown not only the greatness of the Communist Party's achievement in elaborating its political line but also the Party's striking ability to implement this line in close connection with the broad toiling peasant masses. S. P. Trapeznikov demon-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Heritage We Renounce", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1963, p. 526.

s ra es here on he bas s of concre e fac s ha ob ec ve and sub ec ve cond ons for he rans on o o a co ec v sa on of agri cu ure r pened dur ng he a e 920s and ear y 930s The ma er a and ech n ca prerequs es ex sed for he ransfer of nd v dua peasan farms o arge sca e soc a s agri cu ure produc on The Par y convnced he peasan s hrough mass propaganda and ag a on and he prac ca ac v y of he s a e farms and co ec ve farms ha rans on o arge sca e soc a s agri cu ure was he on y so u on o pover y poor harves s and he cons an hrea of crop fa ure The Par y defined he organ sa ona measures for h s rans on he ra e and forms of co opera on he degree of read ness of d fferen areas for o a co ec v sa on and for over com ng he res sance of he ku aks e c

S P Trapezn kov s work shows he Commun s Par y as a crea ve force wh ch has deve oped Len n s deas on bu d ng commun sm fur her and app ed hem n he course of he grea revo u on n he coun rys de The ac v y of he Len n s Par y s shown o he reader n s d vers y purposefu ness and ab y no on y o eabora e a po ca ne bu a so o mpemen n cose connec on w h he broad o ng peasan masses confden y bu d ng a new fe under he gu dance of he Par y

The au hor has devo ed v v d pages of h s work o he ac ua course of he revo u on n he coun rys de— o he dec s ve s ep aken by m ons of peasan s from pe y nd v dua ho d ngs o arge sca e soc a s produc on Th s was ne ru y revo u onary smash ng of a ype of farm ng ha had formed over cen ures and he crea on of a new unpreceden ed co ec ve agri cu ure repre sen ng a urn ng po n n he consc ousness and psycho gy of he masses and n everyday fe se f The peasants hemse ves un ed under he eadershp of he Par y were consc ous par cpan s n and au hors of h s s ep owards a new fe n h s connec on S P Trapezn kov d rec s espec a a en on o he grea heore cal and po ca mpor ance of he conc us on drawn by he Cen ra Comm ee of he Par y n November 929 ha he dec s ve change n he a ude of he poor and m dd e peasan masses o wards he co ec ve farms *marks a new h s or ca s age n bu d ng soc a sm n our coun ry*

An mpor an pace s g ven o exam na on of he prob ems of organ s ng he nerna fe of co ec ve farms The au hor cor rec ly po n s ou ha he crea on of new soc a s me hods of co

lective work and principles of labour payment and the organisation of socialised agricultural production were an extremely complex and difficult matter. The united peasants did not, of course, have the experience necessary to organise production and collective life. Tireless efforts, immense creative initiative and persistence in achieving goals were required in order gradually to re-educate the individual peasant of yesterday with his psychology and habits of farming, inherited from his fathers and grandfathers, and transform him into a worker in collective socialist production.

The victory and consolidation of the collective-farm system was an important condition for the historic victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War.

The concluding sections of this work describe the course followed by the collective-farm system up to the present day. S. P. Trapeznikov shows that during this period the collective-farm system has risen to a new, higher stage. Collective farms have become even larger and possess large stocks of machinery and equipment; the standard of land cultivation and agricultural productivity have risen substantially.

S. P. Trapeznikov's two-volume work generalises the experience of the land of Soviets in solving one of the complex problems of socialist construction and shows its international importance. It will promote further study and assimilation of the practical experience gained by the first country of socialism in solving the agrarian and peasant question.

Academician *I. I. Mints*  
Academician *P. N. Pospelov*



Part one

RUSSIA ON THE EVE  
OF PROFOUND  
REVOLUTIONARY  
UPHEAVALS





## CHAPTER I

# THE BEGINNING OF THE LENINIST STAGE IN SCIENTIFIC ELABORATION OF THE AGRARIAN AND PEASANT PROBLEM

There is no area of social development that cannot be illuminated by the penetrating light of Marxist-Leninist scholarship. One important area is the agrarian problem, each aspect of which has been substantiated theoretically in the works of classic Marxist-Leninist authors and given living creative embodiment in the practical activity of the CPSU and the fraternal parties of the socialist countries.

Agrarian relations represent an area of social life deeply rooted in mankind's history. In essence they embrace four basic elements: firstly, the land question—a question of one of the main sources of people's lives; secondly, the question of its producers—the peasants, who represent the most numerous section of the world's population; thirdly, the question of agriculture, i.e. technology and methods of working the soil; fourthly, the social question—the relationship between rural producers and urban producers, town and country and industry and agriculture. It is in this complex that the agrarian question is examined by the classic Marxist-Leninist authors. No other theory had previously attained such totality and fundamentality as that achieved by Marxism-Leninism in the theoretical generalisations of the founders of scientific communism.

The land question was the very first element in the historical development of society. This is quite natural. Mankind began its existence on the land, from which it extracted and continues to extract life-giving sources of social wealth and material means for the existence and multiplication of the human race. At the same time, land became one of the first objects for the emergence of private property and a cause for the division of society into antagonistic classes and many centuries of harsh social struggle. Since

class society came into being, the struggle for land ownership has constituted its main and most characteristic feature.

This struggle has acquired a still more fierce and more class-orientated character during the era of capitalism, in which the concentration of private ownership of the instruments and means of production and class antagonisms have reached a high level. Capitalism, by its internal social nature, has polished, concentrated and brought to the fore all elements of the agrarian problem: the land, peasant, agricultural and social questions. It may confidently be stated that this problem is the product of capitalism. That is why the agrarian and peasant question has become so pressing and vital in the era of capitalism.

In Russia the agrarian problem became topical and acquired primary importance in the middle of the last century, i.e. after the 1861 Reform, when the Russian state decisively adopted the path of capitalist development. For Russia this watershed marked the beginning of feudalism's collapse and confirmed the era of capitalism. It is not surprising, therefore, that advanced social thought in Russia initially turned its attention specifically to investigation of the agrarian and peasant question and the quest for correct, less painful ways of resolving it.

Looking back today, we can state that the correct and truly scientific solution of the agrarian and peasant question in Russia was owed to Marxist thought, at the head of which stood the great theoretician and revolutionary, Lenin. His theoretical heritage, embodied in the living revolutionary practice of the masses, remains a supremely valuable programme of action under contemporary conditions. The vital force of Marxist-Leninist theory lies in the fact that it provides a scientific foundation for implementing fundamental agricultural reforms and bringing the toiling masses of the peasantry to socialism.

As already noted, the agrarian and peasant question in Russia became topical in the middle of the last century. After the 1861 Reform it remained for almost 60 years at the centre of attention of advanced social thought. This was a historical era in which the agrarian problem was the most acute, complex and important issue. It is not surprising, therefore, that not a single political party in Russia was without an agrarian programme and that not a single major public figure or outstanding writer or artist failed to respond to this burning issue. As a result, numerous agrarian theories, doctrines and platforms of all kinds appeared in Russia.

Agrarian theories, having sprung from the soil of revolutionary-democratic ideas, underwent substantial changes in the course of

historical development. Bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologists exercised a quite strong liberal-bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influence at a certain stage. However, while bringing the agrarian problem into prominence, they were unable to give a correct scientific explanation of it. Some reduced this problem merely to forms of land use, confining it within the bounds of the land question; others reduced it to the land-hunger of the peasants, seeing it in terms of the peasant question, while yet others gave greatest prominence to the agricultural question, confining themselves to the material and technical conditions of land husbandry. All these agrarian theories were unconnected with the political and class struggle and detached from the great liberation movement of Russia's working class.

Truly scientific elaboration of the agrarian and peasant question began with the penetration of Marxist thought into Russia and the formation of the first Marxist group—Emancipation of Labour group. However, the latter did no more than take the first steps in this direction. The entire burden of theoretical elaboration of the agrarian and peasant question lay on Lenin's shoulders. He was the first Marxist in Russia to find the key to solving this highly complex problem of social and economic development. He liberated the agrarian problem from the narrow, anti-scientific framework within which petty-bourgeois and bourgeois ideologists had sought to imprison it.

Lenin showed all the diversity of the agrarian question, which comprises such interconnected issues as the land, social and agricultural questions. These are questions which cannot be broken up into separate parts, as the opponents of Marxism sought to do. How could the agricultural backwardness of the country be explained without reference to the dominance of medieval forms of landholding? How could peasant land-hunger be explained other than in terms of the existence of enormous land stocks in the hands of the tsar and the landlords? How could the toiling peasantry be released from medieval bondage without a struggle for land and for progressive forms of land use, without a struggle for agricultural progress and the ongoing development of the productive forces?

We find exhaustive answers to all these questions in Lenin's works and in the agrarian programmes of Russian Social-Democracy elaborated by him. In drafting the first agrarian programme of the RSDLP, he wrote: "By an agrarian programme we mean a definition of the guiding principles of Social-Democratic policy on the agrarian question, i.e. policy in relation to agriculture and

the various classes, sections, and groups of the rural population.”<sup>1</sup> Lenin brought perfect clarity to understanding of the agrarian question; he elaborated a scientific agrarian theory and defined the scientific strategy and tactics of the Party in relation to the three stages of the Russian revolution in conformity with it.

From the very moment of his entrance upon the political stage, Lenin addressed himself to elucidating the new processes of social and economic development in post-Reform Russia and to eliciting the potential capabilities of the revolutionary forces of the peasantry as the main ally of the proletariat in the approaching popular revolution. The first Marxist work belonging to his pen, which appeared in 1893, was devoted to the agrarian question. This was a comparatively short but profound article entitled “New Economic Developments in Peasant Life”,<sup>2</sup> which marked the beginning of Marxist research into the agrarian question. From then on Lenin devoted unflinching attention to this problem.

Lenin commenced scientific examination of the agrarian question with an economic analysis of agrarian relations and an investigation of the new phenomena emerging in the social life of post-Reform Russia. He understood that the historical movement of mankind is determined primarily by the objective development of the productive forces and by the production relations of people; examination of the agrarian problem had therefore to begin with the study of society's economic structure. The Marxist method enabled him to undertake a fundamental review of the mistaken agrarian views of many theoreticians and creatively to re-elaborate and develop this field of science, transforming it into a powerful means of struggle by the oppressed masses of working people.

When Lenin appeared on the political stage in Russia much had already been written on the agrarian question. However, all these writings suffered from a narrowness of outlook and the failure of their authors to understand the objective laws of social and economic development.

The main ideologists of the peasantry during the 1880s and 1890s were the liberal Narodniks, who inundated Russia with their publications on the agrarian question. Having renounced the revolutionary-democratic ideas of their predecessors, the liberal Narodniks began to formulate arguments in support of moderate, reformist methods of resolving the agrarian question. They

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “The Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Moscow, 1964, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1963, pp. 11-73.

explained all the deprivations of peasant life as a consequence of landlessness, the burden of taxes and the social underdevelopment of the countryside, which, supposedly, could easily be overcome by means of legislative acts passed by the tsarist government. All contemporary Narodnik writings on the agrarian question distorted the real situation in the countryside, idealised the old patriarchal life and smoothed over the class antagonisms that had emerged in the peasantry.

The first Marxists, headed by G. V. Plekhanov, were far removed from the concrete reality of Russia and concentrated their attention principally on propagating the theoretical ideas of Marxism in general. Moreover, the problems of Marxist agrarian theory occupied an insignificant place in this activity and not fortuitously so. While becoming disappointed in Narodnik peasant socialism, Plekhanov himself failed to find correct means of resolving the agrarian and peasant question: in the struggle against the Narodnik movement, therefore, he himself often slipped into its petty-bourgeois positions.

Naturally, the appearance of Lenin's agrarian works had enormous importance under such circumstances. Lenin approached the agrarian question in a new and creative way, linking the struggle of the peasant masses against the oppression of landlords and capitalists with the struggle of the working class for the political, economic and spiritual liberation of all working people in a single complex. He was the first to give a scientific description of social differentiation within the peasantry and to show the enormous revolutionary possibilities concealed in its depths; he elaborated the problem of the nationalisation of land in the conditions of bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions and substantiated both the necessity for organising the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat into an independent class force and the role of revolutionary organs of peasant self-government. *In linking the agrarian problem with the class and political struggle of the proletariat, Lenin indicated ways of combining the revolutionary-democratic movement of the peasantry with the socialist movement of the working class.*

Lenin's agrarian programmes were a splendid example of creative development of Marxist agrarian theory and policy. Long before the appearance of Bolshevism, agrarian programmes were adopted by almost all the Social-Democratic parties of Western countries, but none of these programmes was able correctly to solve this problem. The Social-Democratic parties of the West confined themselves in their agrarian programmes to reformist demands, while the peasantry itself was regarded as a reserve of

the bourgeoisie—as a class unable to grasp the socialist ideas of the proletariat or to become its reliable ally. Social-opportunists prepared only one fate for the peasants—ruin and transformation into hired agricultural workers. They considered that only after capitalism had finished its expropriative work would an utterly ruined, proletarianised peasantry stand on a par with the urban proletariat and become its ally. These anti-Marxist positions were held by the Mensheviks, Trotskyites, Bukharinites and other opportunists.

After completely smashing the anti-Leninist concepts of the Mensheviks, Trotskyites and Bukharinites, who sowed distrust in the ability of the working class to lead the toiling peasantry, the Party of Lenin upheld and implemented the Leninist theory of initially building socialism in one country. Unswervingly guided by this theory, the Party elaborated a correct, truly scientific policy of mutual relations between the working class and the peasantry, expanding and strengthening the economic and political basis for their cooperation and friendship.

Bourgeois prejudices that the socialist path of development was alien to the Russian peasantry and that it would inevitably lead to a clash between the peasantry and the working class over the main and fundamental question of building socialism were exploded. Reality rejected these anti-scientific prejudices of pseudo-Marxist theoreticians. The Soviet peasantry demonstrated in practice that, in alliance with the working class and under its leadership, it could successfully follow the socialist path.

The October Socialist Revolution not only brought the toiling peasantry political and economic liberation but also made available to it enormous material benefits. It freed the peasants from the oppression of landlords and capitalists, smashed the old exploitative land relations, eliminated peasant land-hunger and cleared the way for the construction of a new, socialist life. This way was paved by the leading forces of the Soviet peasantry under the leadership of the working class with comprehensive material support from the Soviet government. The great historic mission of becoming the first country of large-scale socialist agriculture fell to the Soviet Union.

Lenin pointed out more than once that no fundamental differences exist between the interests of the working class and those of the toiling peasantry and that socialism is fully capable of satisfying the interests of both. This brilliant Leninist principle has now been translated into reality. It may be said with complete justification that one of the main indications of the strength and vitality

of Lenin's ideas is the historic fact that the Soviet peasantry has taken its stand firmly and irrevocably under the socialist banner of the working class.

## 1. SPECIFIC HISTORICAL FEATURES OF RUSSIA'S AGRARIAN DEVELOPMENT AND REASONS FOR ITS BACKWARDNESS

Profound study of Russia's agrarian development enabled Lenin to carry out comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the country's economic backwardness. This had become so menacing to the Russian state as to pose the real danger of the latter's losing its integrity and independence. Of course, Russia's economic backwardness did not emerge from nowhere: it had formed over many centuries and had long been a scourge for the country's peoples. At a time when the economic development of the countries of Europe had moved far ahead, Russia could no longer remain in its old position without running the risk of being crushed by powerful capitalist states.

History provides many examples of civilised states which were unable to make timely use of great technical and economic revolutions and found themselves in extremely difficult circumstances. This has often led to tragic consequences when, because of backwardness and failure to understand the factor of time and opposition by reactionary circles to this progress, entire states have been erased from the map and entire empires have disappeared. In this respect objective laws are the strictest and most merciless judges. Such a catastrophe almost overtook Russia. When, during the 18th century, such European states as Britain and France had moved into the forefront as a result of technical and economic advances, Russia was frozen in the grip of backwardness. The country was threatened by downfall. Russia was saved by the Great October Socialist Revolution.

The first alarm signal for Russia was the Crimean War (1853-1856), which forcefully revealed the fundamental defects of the state and its entire social and economic system. "The Crimean War," Engels wrote, "was specifically characterised by the hopeless struggle of a nation with primitive forms of production against nations with contemporary production."<sup>1</sup> Events showed

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 38, Berlin, S. 467.

that the Russian empire was in decline. While in Western Europe capitalist relations had long been flourishing, industry was developing successfully and internal and external markets had formed, the feudal system, patriarchal relations and the most backward forms of natural economy continued to dominate in Russia.

Russia remained within the grip of feudal seclusion and patriarchal isolation for a very long time and entered upon the path of capitalist development too late. While the peasant was attached to the land during the early Middle Ages in Western Europe, this occurred in Russia only in the 17th century, i.e. when only the remnants of feudal obligations were left of the feudal system in the West. Moreover, the feudal system itself in Russia greatly differed from the feudal system in the countries of Europe and was exceptionally burdensome for the peasants, who were plunged into actual slavery.

This was principally explained by two circumstances characteristic of Russia: firstly, in contrast to the West, where the peasant was attached chiefly to the land, for which he had definite obligations to his lord, the peasant in Russia was attached less to the land than to an individual landowner, who could sell him without land and treat him as a slave; secondly, the burden of the feudal system was increased still further for the peasants of Russia by the fact that there, on immature economic ground, a centralised state had been early to emerge. This meant that the peasant had to bear a double obligation—both to the landowner and to the state.

The emergence of a centralised Russian state was, of course, a highly progressive phenomenon. Elimination of feudal fragmentation was a major step forward in the political development of Russia. However, centralisation of the country was accompanied by the growth of all forms of feudal exploitation, in particular an increased tax burden and an expansion of obligations of all kinds levied upon the peasants to benefit both feudal landowners and the state. But barbarous feudal despotism, legalised by the centralised monarchical state, was especially burdensome and sometimes intolerable.

The result of all this was, on the one hand, extreme exhaustion of Russia's economy and the undermining of the very foundations of the state and, on the other hand, ceaseless peasant unrest, sometimes achieving nation-wide dimensions (the peasant wars led by Razin and Pugachev). A total of 556 mass peasant uprisings were registered in Russia in the course of 1826–1854 alone, i. e. an average of 19 uprisings annually: 41 uprisings from 1826 to 1829, 46 uprisings from 1830 to 1834, 59 uprisings from 1835 to 1839,



101 uprisings from 1840 to 1844, 172 uprisings from 1845 to 1849 and 137 uprisings from 1850 to 1854.)

Peasant Russia, like a volcano, constantly erupted in revolutionary struggle waged by the suffering peasantry. Urgent economic and political demands implacably dictated the implementation of reforms which would eliminate all obstacles to the country's progressive development. Such, at least, was the role the "emancipating" Reform of 1861 was intended to play. However, because of special historical circumstances Russia advanced very slowly along the path of development marked out by Europe even after the reform.

The question arises: why, after the elimination of feudalism, did the countries of Europe develop economically with such rapidity and why did this not happen in Russia? The answer lies in the character of the reform and in those social forces which elaborated and implemented it.

It is necessary above all to keep in mind that historical and economic conditions were more favourable in the West to the expansion of world economic links and the development of a commodity-money economy than they were in Russia. Such factors as the proximity of seas, numerous navigable rivers, the early growth of commerce, trades and, later, industry and commercial agriculture all served to hasten the dissolution of the natural economy and to ensure that the elimination of feudal relations in the West took place not only at an early stage but also much more rapidly.

No less important was the fact that a new class took shape at the heart of this new process: the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, which led the struggle against the feudal class. In the majority of European countries, therefore, the downfall of the feudal system occurred in the course of bourgeois revolutions, in which the peasantry played a revolutionary role. The peasantry acted on the side of the bourgeoisie during the period of the early revolutions (in the 16th century in Germany, the 17th century in Britain and the 18th century in France), giving them by their participation a sweeping scope and a revolutionary-democratic character. Engels wrote that "in all the three great bourgeois risings, the peasantry furnishes the army that has to do the fighting."<sup>1</sup>

The position was different in Russia. The retarded development of commodity-money and market relations and the undivided dominance of the nobility and landowners, supported by the cen-

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific", in: K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1973, p. 105.

tralised state government, enabled the old feudal system to hold its ground. Although the influence of the West penetrated Russia long before the "emancipating" reform, its models were nevertheless transferred with difficulty on to Russian soil. Despite attempts by the progressive forces of Russia and major peasant uprisings, the historical process in Russia was not turned in the direction of a revolutionary smashing of feudal relations.

Of course, the main reason for this lay in economic relations. Russia lacked those social forces which could have implemented a revolution in the social and economic system itself. The peasant class was alone and because of its position could not resist the landlords, who were protected by the might of the government of the centralised monarchical state. This was why the "emancipating" Reform of 1861, although carried out under pressure from below, was implemented not in the course of a revolution, not by the bourgeois class and certainly not by the peasantry itself, but by the aristocratic state allied with the feudal landlords. Naturally, such a reform could give little either to the peasants or to the nascent industrial bourgeoisie. It was conducted in the interests of continued landownership by landlords and of strengthening the state power of that class.

The most vulnerable area of reform was the land question, which during subsequent stages of post-Reform Russia became the main focus of class struggle in the countryside. The reform did not give the peasants all the land they had worked for untold centuries and which they legitimately considered their own. The best peasant lands, meadows, ponds and woods were cut off for the benefit of the landlords. These so-called "cut-off lands" were the main cause of all subsequent conflicts, enmity and backwardness. On average, the cut-off lands constituted one-fifth of all peasant lands in Russia.

Many contemporary sources describe the losses suffered by the peasants as a result of the "cut-off lands" in detail. However, irrespective of the scale of the "cut-off lands", they were in each case the surest means of enslavement of the peasants by the landlords. The peasants' lands were wedged in between those of the landlords, bringing about the open-field system, farming of remote fields and strip farming by peasants. All this served as a source of enrichment for the landlords, obliging the peasants to agree to one-sided leases, the corvée, etc.

The peasants' land allotments were not only unintegrated but were also generally acknowledged to be so scanty that, in one way or another, the peasant was forced to return to a position of

dependence upon the landlord. Thus, for example, the average real plot in the country was 4.8 dessiatines<sup>1</sup> per capita of the male population; subsequently, as a result of population growth and the fragmentation of farming, the plots received by the peasants were steadily reduced in size.

It should not be forgotten, either, that land was not given to the peasants gratis. They were obliged to pay enormous sums of money for it. Having valued peasant land at 867 million rubles, the government was able to pay this sum to the landlords immediately; the peasants had then to reimburse the government over 49 years at 6 per cent per annum of the total. As a result, the peasants long remained "under a temporary obligation". They were able to sell or mortgage their allotments only after reimbursing the government.

With the object of enslaving the peasants by keeping them in perpetual debt, the government conducted a revaluation of land just before the Reform, sharply increasing its cost.

The difference between sale prices and the redemption price is abundantly clear from the following table calculated by A. Y. Lositsky<sup>2</sup>:

Gubernias	Area of allotment, thous. of dess.	Value of allotments, millions of rubles		
		at 1854-1859 prices	at 1863-1872 prices	at redemption
Non-Black-Earth . . . . .	12,286	155	180	342
Black-Earth . . . . .	9,841	219	284	342
Western . . . . .	10,141	170	184	183
Total . . . . .	32,268	544	648	867

All students of this period agree that the peasants were over-charged the sum of 323 million rubles for their lands, since at the then current prices the land transferred to them was worth not 867 million rubles but 544 million rubles. Similarly, it is acknowledged that this was an "excess payment" to landlords for the loss

<sup>1</sup> dessiatine = 2.7 acres.

<sup>2</sup> See A. Lositsky, *Vykupnaya operatsiya* (The Redemption Operation), St. Petersburg, 1906, p. 16 (in Russian).

of their serfs, the peasants being obliged not only to redeem their land but also to pay too dearly for their "freedom". According to Lositsky's data, in addition to land redemption payments the landlords also received as compensation an average supplementary payment of 36.1 rubles for each serf in the Black-Earth zone and 62.3 rubles in the non-Black-Earth zone, totalling 123 million rubles and 187 million rubles respectively.

In 1901 Lenin wrote in the newspaper *Iskra* in connection with the fortieth anniversary of the emancipation of the peasants: "Actually, the peasants were emancipated from the land, inasmuch as the plots they had tilled for centuries were ruthlessly cut down and hundreds of thousands of peasants were deprived of all their land and settled on a quarter of beggar's allotment. In point of fact, the peasants were doubly robbed: not only were their plots of land cut down, but they had to pay 'redemption money' for the land left to them, and which had always been in their possession; the redemption price, moreover, was far above the actual value of the land. Ten years after the emancipation of the peasantry the landlords themselves admitted to government officials investigating the state of agriculture that the peasants had been made to pay, not only for their land, but for their personal liberty".<sup>1</sup>

A multitude of direct and indirect taxes which absorbed the bulk of peasants' incomes were soon added to the enormous redemption payments. It is sufficient to state that between 1862 and 1880 direct taxes rose from 56,037,000 rubles to 125,332,000 rubles, i.e. more than doubled, while indirect taxes rose from 175,995,000 rubles to 348,485,000 rubles.<sup>2</sup> Overall, taxes alone reached almost 500 million rubles per annum. Clearly, there could be no question of agricultural improvement of peasant farms under such conditions, since in many cases payments exceeded income from the land.

An entire system of measures was introduced guaranteeing the strict implementation of agrarian reform with the object of ensuring the receipt of payments and the maintenance of the "new"

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Workers' Party and the Peasantry", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4. Moscow, 1964, p. 420.

<sup>2</sup> Detailed information on the growth in direct and indirect taxes between 1862 and 1880 is given in: P. Saburov, *Materials on the History of Russian Finances, 1866-1897*, St. Petersburg, 1899, pp. 23-26, Addenda Nos. 35, 36, *Ministry of Finance, 1802-1902*, Part, 1, St. Petersburg, 1902, pp. 632-634 (in Russian).

order that had been established. Among these measures were the continued preservation and strengthening of community land use, the introduction of mutual guarantees which were binding through the responsibility of all for each, the obliging of defaulters and their families to work off debts, the naming of guardians for defaulters, sale of the property of defaulters, corporal punishment, etc. An entire army of overseers, guardians and officials placed over the peasants constituted a dead weight upon the latter while executing the will of the landlords and the government with especial zeal.

I. Moszhukhin described the position of peasantry after the reform in the following words: "The era of 1861 left as its legacy the class isolation of the peasants under the wardship of village elders and volost foremen, supervised by secular intermediaries and under the jurisdiction of temporary volost courts. Corporal punishment, collective liability, the placing of peasants unable to meet payments under wardship and their obligation to undertake paid labour, compulsory registration with village and volost societies and exile to Siberia at the sentence of the society without a court trial were the most important survivals of feudal law".<sup>1</sup>

The slow development of agrarian relations in post-Reform Russia was thus determined by the very character of the reform, which, because of particular circumstances, could not bring about a drastic change in the development of the productive forces. The reform set Russia on the path of agonising evolution, involving the ruin of the peasantry and the decay of rural economic life. From this process stem all the reasons for the sharp difference between the development of Russia and that of Western countries during the period following the collapse of feudalism.

For example, in many European countries, especially those of Scandinavia, as well as in the United States, the rapid development of capitalism permitted the accelerated formation of large farms based on private land ownership and the extensive use of capitalist leasing. (By the beginning of the 20th century 40.2 per cent of all farms in the seven principal states of Europe (Italy, Germany, France, Austria, Belgium, Britain and the Netherlands) were leased; in the United States 50.8 per cent of the total land area belonged to farms. Lease-holding of land undoubtedly played an important progressive role in the transition from the feudal to the capitalist system of farming. This was seen with especial clarity

<sup>1</sup> I. Moszhukhin, *Agrarny vopros v tsifrakh i faktakh deistvitelnosti* (The Agrarian Question in Actual Figures and Facts), Moscow, 1917, p. 27 (in Russian).

in the development of agriculture in Britain and Belgium, where the proportion of lease-holding was highest.)

In Russia the process of capitalising agricultural production was greatly retarded. Although the elimination of feudalism opened up broad horizons for Russia's economic development, the enslavement of the peasants by landlords, the survival of feudal elements, the continuation of compulsory commune membership and the levying of exorbitant redemption payments caused the process of capitalisation to proceed extremely slowly.

Despite the historical features of Russia's economic development, the basic patterns of capitalism's penetration of agriculture remained common. Differences in this respect among the countries of Europe related only to time and pace: in some countries capitalism's penetration of agriculture began earlier, in others it commenced considerably later. The same was true of the pace of its development: in some countries this was rapid and all-embracing, while in others it was slow and limited in its effect. Russia was among those countries where the development of capitalism was slow and greatly delayed; however, it followed the same paths as it did in the West.

## 2. THE EVOLUTION OF LANDLORD AND PEASANT FARMING IN THE DIRECTION OF CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT

Despite all the painful circumstances of the landlords' agrarian reform, it nevertheless formed a watershed in Russia's economic development. After the reform the new social and economic processes, whose impact was rapidly destroying the old feudal system founded primarily on the *corvée* and the labour-service system, could not but be noticed. The most important result of the Reform was that "all the main foundations of this system were undermined: natural economy, the self-contained and the self-sufficient character of the landed estate, the close connection between its various constituents, and the landlord's power over the peasants. The peasant's farm was separated from that of the landlord; the peasant was to buy back his land and become the full owner of it; the landlord, to adopt the capitalist system of farming, which ... has a diametrically opposite basis".<sup>1)</sup>

The capitalist system of farming would undoubtedly change not

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1972, p. 193.

only forms of landownership but also the very character of the agricultural economy in Russia. By involving peasant farming in commodity-money and market relations, capitalism destroyed the primeval forms of bondage and personal dependence, broadened the sphere of economic activity and increased the flow of capital into agriculture.

The post-Reform agricultural economy of Russia was distinguished by the most fantastic and diverse interlocking of capitalist and natural feudal forms, the struggle between which determined the entire evolution of post-Reform agriculture, including both its advance and its decline. Russia was therefore obliged to undergo a prolonged era of transition, during which the system combined features of the corvée and of capitalism. Lenin concluded on the basis of profound economic analysis that, because of the circumstances indicated above, immediate transition from the first system to the second was impossible. There were two reasons for this, one objective, the other subjective.

Firstly, the immaturity of commodity-money relations in Russia meant that the material conditions for immediate transition to capitalist production in agriculture were absent. Above all, the new system of farming demanded the existence of a class of people accustomed to work for wages. Further, it demanded large investments by landlords in organising agriculture of a high professional standard and the purchase of agricultural equipment to replace that of the peasants, which had hitherto been used. These conditions could not form immediately. Even far-sighted landlords, their enthusiasm captured by Western models of capitalist farming and filled with the desire to imitate them, initially experienced enormous difficulties.

Secondly, the corvée system was only undermined, not demolished. The peasant farm remained dependent to a large extent on the landlord's estate, since a portion of the peasants' allotments remained in the hands of the landlords.

Thus, capitalist economy could not emerge at once, and corvée economy could not disappear at once. The only possible system of economy was, accordingly, a transitional one, a system combining the features of both the corvée and the capitalist system. And indeed, the post-Reform system of farming practised by the landlords bears precisely these features. With all the endless variety of forms characteristic of a transitional epoch, the economic organisation of contemporary landlord farming amounts to two main sys-

tems, in the most varied combinations—the labour-service system and the capitalist system”.<sup>1</sup>

The differences between these systems were immense. Under the corvée system, the peasants cultivated the landlord's property with their own draft animals and equipment in return for payment principally in kind—land, pastures, winter loans, etc. The inevitable concomitant of the labour-service system was bondage instead of free hire. As a result of labour-service leasing the peasants were always in debt to the landlord; since they were in a position of dependence upon him they were forced to agree to any conditions, simply in order not to die of hunger. It is true that here, too, monetary payments were sometimes made, but these in no way altered the essence of the labour-service system.

The capitalist system, however, presupposed cultivation of the land with the equipment and draft animals of the landowner and with the use of labour freely hired for a year, some specific period or a day and invariably remunerated in cash. This system was incomparably more progressive than the corvée. It stimulated increased labour productivity, economic enterprise and the growth of agricultural production.

However, despite the heterogeneous character of these systems, they had nevertheless to exist side by side for some time and to become fantastically interlocked, giving rise to profound contradictions and conflicts and clearing the way for the development of new, progressive forms of farming. Indeed, while capitalist forms of farming were initially extremely underdeveloped, they became quite widespread in the 1890s. Elements of capitalist husbandry began increasingly to emerge on landlords' estates. This was shown especially well by Lenin, who used as an example the farm of the landlord Engelhardt, where the labour-service system was supplanted by capitalist forms of husbandry. It is true that labour-service survived even on such farms, but it now occupied a subordinate position in relation to free hire and was greatly modified.<sup>2</sup>

In his economic works Lenin convincingly demonstrated that the replacement of the corvée economy by capitalist economy on landlords' estates proceeded wholly in the direction of confirming the dominance of capitalist relations. However, because of the complex interlocking of these two heterogeneous systems and the lack of adequate statistics, it was impossible to determine precisely

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 216-17.



how far this process had advanced and which of the systems then predominated on landlords' estates. Lenin referred to the data of N. Annensky in drawing up the following table of the extent and combination of the two systems during the 1880s<sup>1</sup>:

Gubernia groups according to system of economy predominant on landowners' estates	Number of gubernias			Area under all cereals and potatoes on private owners' estates (thous. dess.)
	In black- earth belt	In non- black-earth belt	Total	
I. Gubernias where the <b>capitalist</b> system predominates . . . . .	9	10	19	7,407
II. Gubernias where a <b>mixed</b> system predominates . .	3	4	7	2,222
III. Gubernias where the <b>labour-service</b> system predominates . . . . .	12	5	17	6,281
Total . . . . .	24	19	43	15,910

Although, as can be seen, these statistics are too approximate and limited in the range of gubernias to which they refer they nevertheless provide a picture of the evolution of large-scale private landholding in the direction of capitalist development.

The evolution of landowner and peasant farming after the Reform was thus in the direction of capitalist development. "The main feature of the post-Reform evolution of agriculture is its growing commercial, entrepreneur character."<sup>2</sup> In order to gain a clear conception of these new processes in post-Reform development, the most characteristic features of them, processes inherent to capitalist relations in agriculture, should be examined.

Firstly, in every European country capitalist relations initially embraced the sphere of circulation, later gradually penetrating into the sphere of production. This was quite natural: exchange organised on capitalist lines has always preceded capitalist production, at first coexisting with non-capitalist production. Capitalism,

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 196

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 311.

appearing as commerce and usury, was at the outset obliged to reconcile itself to this role, since there was no other method which could so successfully undermine and break up the foundations of natural economy in agriculture and transform it into a commodity economy.

Agriculture was becoming commodity-type neither immediately nor uniformly in different parts of the country; on the contrary, the market subordinated to itself different branches in different places, later coming to dominate all farming with its ramified links. The process of gaining control over all agricultural production formed the culmination of capitalism, not its genesis. "Commercial agriculture is steadily growing in Russia in spite of all obstacles, and this commercial agriculture is inevitably being transformed into capitalist agriculture, although the forms of this transformation are diverse in the highest degree and vary from district to district."<sup>1</sup> Thus, market relations and trade capital represented the first avenues pursued by capitalism in agriculture. "The market is a category of commodity economy, which in the course of its development is transformed into capitalist economy and only under the latter gains complete sway and universal prevalence."<sup>2</sup>

Among the first signs of the penetration of Russia's agriculture by trade capital was the strengthened movement of landownership and the transformation of land into an object to be bought and sold. Landownership became extremely mobile. It is sufficient to note that while 49,748 land deals involving 8,575,436 dessiatines valued at 125,430,000 rubles were completed during the first five years after the Reform—from 1863 to 1867—191,380 land deals involving 19,704,836 dessiatines valued at 1,302,985,000 rubles were completed during the five years from 1898 to 1902.

These statistics show that large resources of land entered commodity circulation and an enormous influx of capital occurred for the purchase of land. This process was accompanied by the fundamental dissolution of the old system of landholding, which was associated with particular social estates and the formation of a class system of landholding unrelated to social estates. Although this process affected the landlord-nobility estate and the peasant estate equally, it was nevertheless first manifested in the ruling

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Question in Russia towards the Close of the Nineteenth Century", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, Moscow, 1977, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 37.

estate. As the popular saying has it, "a fish always begins to rot from the head".

The disintegration of feudal society began with the dissolution of the social elite that was associated with the declining role of the nobility in agriculture and the growing proportion of landholding unrelated to social estates. After the 1861 Reform landlord-nobility landholding continued steadily to decline.

Of course, the nobility's land losses cannot be regarded as a process of self-liquidation of landholding by landlords. It should not be forgotten that landlords bought as well as sold land. Land was concentrated in the hands of economically strong landowners through the elimination of smallholdings and estates of the enfeebled nobility.

The decline of small estates of the nobility was paralleled by the growth of large latifundia; in many the dominance of the corvée system went hand-in-hand with the emergence and consolidation of capitalist forms of farming. The dissolution of landlord landholding resulted initially in the emergence of merchant and later of large-peasant landholding, i. e. capitalist-type landownership. This is made clear by the following data relating to the average annual dimensions of land mobility among various social-estates (in dessiatines)<sup>1</sup>:

Years	Nobility state officials	Merchants and honorary citizens	Peasants		
			Individual	Associations	Societies
1863 — 1872	— 644,691	+ 445,064	+ 73,488	+ 55,793	+ 10,361
1873 — 1882	— 949,072	+ 450,226	+ 157,723	+ 150,961	+ 23,879

The table shows that the greater part of the land lost by the minor nobility was acquired by merchants or rich peasants, purchasing land individually or in associations. The societies, which comprised the bulk of the poor peasants, purchased an insignificant proportion of the land sold: far too little to satisfy the demand arising from the natural growth of the peasant population.

<sup>1</sup> See *Obschestvennoye dvizhenie v Rossii v nachale XX veka* (The Social Movement in Russia at the Beginning of the 20th Century), Vol. 1, St. Petersburg, 1909, p. 22 (in Russian).

Thus a new social figure emerged in the countryside in the course of the mobility of landownership. This was the merchant-usurer, the trader in land. Of course, such parasitic elements were least involved in agricultural production: for them land was only an object of sale and purchase with the aim of accumulating capital. The growth in purchases therefore went hand-in-hand with an annual increase in the sale of merchants' land.

Such land mobility did not, of course, promote development of the productive forces in agriculture. Indeed, after purchasing "nests of the gentlefolk" usurers treated these lands in an even more predatory fashion than had their former owners and later reselling them to neighbouring peasants. Nevertheless, the penetration of trade capital into agriculture was initially progressive in character, since it promoted the destruction of feudal-landlord ownership of land.

Who benefited from the increased mobility of landownership? Substantial gains were, of course, made by merchant-usurers, but the landlords from the nobility themselves benefitted even more, receiving colossal sums from the sale and purchase of land in addition to redemption payments. This can be seen from the following statistics<sup>1</sup>:

Years	Redemption loans	Receipts from sales	Total
	millions of rubles		
1863—1872	607.2	115	722.2
1873—1882	158.2	219	377.2
Total . . .	765.4	334.0	1,099.4

Of course, a considerable part of this money was devoted to non-productive expenditure, but a certain portion of capital was undoubtedly invested in the development of farming. The conditions which emerged during the post-Reform period inexorably prompted such investment by landlords. It should be kept in mind that the emancipation of the peasants from feudal dependence meant that landlords increasingly lost not only the unpaid labour of the peasants but also the implements and working animals that

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

belonged to them. In many cases landlords were now obliged to adopt a new basis for farming involving the acquisition of equipment and working animals and the hiring of workers. This, of course, required money. The same was true of the merchants, a section of whom were obliged by circumstances to shift from usury to agricultural production, invest their capital in such production and establish farm-type holdings.

The need for money grew immeasurably in all sections of society. With the passage of time well-to-do peasants, too, began to purchase land on an increasing scale. This had great economic importance. Peasant land purchases showed a particularly marked increase after the formation in 1882 of the Peasant Land Bank, through which they purchased 4,882,000 dessiatines of land valued at 177.9 million rubles between 1883 and 1902. Peasants also purchased land without making use of the bank.

The concentration of landholdings, accompanied by intensified expropriation of the poor peasants, also spread among the peasants. Lenin showed from statistics relating to Samara and Nizhegorodsk gubernias that purchased and leased land was concentrated in the hands of a small group of well-to-do peasants. For example, in Samara Gubernia 90 per cent of all purchased land was held by 1.8 per cent of peasant households and in Nizhegorodsk Gubernia 46.2 per cent of purchased land was held by 9.6 per cent of prosperous peasants. However, 66 per cent of poor peasant households held less than a quarter of all purchased land in the latter gubernia.<sup>1</sup>

This process can also be illustrated through generalised statistics relating to European Russia. These show that between 59.7 per cent and 99 per cent of purchased land was concentrated in the hands of 20 per cent of prosperous peasant households, while 50 per cent of the poor households held from 0.4 per cent to 15.4 per cent of the total quantity of land bought by peasants.<sup>2</sup> A similar picture is observed in relation to leased land, 76 per cent of which was controlled by well-to-do peasants.

This is an extremely important fact, for not only was land concentrated in the hands of the peasant bourgeoisie—this land became the object of more advanced farming utilising improved tools and other agricultural methods. For example, 40-60 per cent

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<sup>1</sup> See V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 88, 120.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 131, 133.

of such cultivators began to use ploughs, horse and steam threshing machines, winnowing machines, reapers, etc. These farms introduced the extensive use of fertilizers and sowed more marketable crops, changed over to multifold crop rotation, etc.

These facts show us "...the presence of all those contradictions which are inherent in every commodity economy and every order of capitalism: competition, the struggle for economic independence, the grabbing of land (purchasable and rentable), the concentration of production in the hands of a minority, the forcing of the majority into the ranks of the proletariat, their exploitation by a minority through the medium of merchant's capital and the hiring of farm labourers".<sup>1</sup>

The influx of capital into agriculture both changed the form of landholding and promoted development of the productive forces, the improvement of agricultural standards and the growth and specialisation of agricultural production. Lenin illustrated these consequences of the post-Reform period with the following statistics, which relate to 50 gubernias in European Russia<sup>2</sup>:

Period	Population (both sexes)	Million chetverts				Net per capita yield, in chetverts, of		
		Sown	Net Yield	Sown	Net Yield			
	Millions	All crops, i.e. cereals plus potatoes		Potatoes		Cereals	Pota- toes	All crops
1864-1866	61.4	72.2	152.8	6.9	17.0	2.21	0.27	2.48
1870-1879	69.8	75.6	211.3	8.7	30.4	2.59	0.43	3.02
1883-1887	81.7	80.3	255.2	10.8	36.2	2.68	0.44	3.12
1885-1894	86.3	92.6	265.2	16.5	44.3	2.57	0.50	3.07
(1900-1904)- 1905	107.6	103.5	396.5	24.9	93.9	2.81	0.87	3.68

On the basis of these statistics Lenin established that the production of cereals and potatoes had increased; moreover, the size of the net yield was growing more rapidly than the size of the sowings and the quantity of cereals harvested was increasing per capita. Statistics show that the quantity of cereals produced for

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 253.

sale increased incomparably more rapidly than the total quantity of cereals produced.

The capitalist nature of the process was made especially manifest in the clear-cut specialisation of agriculture. An explicit shift occurred in agriculture towards expanded planting of more marketable, intensive cash crops. Let us examine this phenomenon, using as an example the distribution of the sowing area among individual crops in 50 gubernias in European Russia:<sup>1</sup>

		1881	1901
Cereals		58,072	66,597
Legumes (peas, beans, lentils)		955	1,256
Potatoes		1,365	2,611
Sugar beet		206	443
Fodder grasses		541	1,086
Flax and hemp		1,883	2,070
Total sowing area	thousands of dessiatines	64,664	74,099

It is clear from the table that agriculture moved steadily towards increased production of more intensive, marketable crops, sowings of which more than doubled overall. This had immense agro-technical as well as economic importance, since the introduction of root-crops improved the technical level of cultivation, increased the fertility of the soil and improved agriculture.

In analysing *Zemstvo* statistics, Lenin showed that clearly delineated areas of agricultural specialisation had emerged by the 1890s. There were grain-growing areas, for example, (principally wheat and barley); areas specialising in industrial crops—hemp, flax, sugar-beet, tobacco; vegetable-growing areas, including potato-growing areas; and, finally, dairying areas. "What is particularly noteworthy is the fact that it is *commercial* agriculture that is growing...."<sup>2</sup>

The facts and figures cited make it clear that until the 1890s (i.e. until the beginning of the agrarian crisis) the post-Reform era was characterised by increasing production, rising agricultural

<sup>1</sup> See A. M. Bolshakov and N. A. Rozhkov, *Khrestomatiya po istorii khozyaistva Rossii* (Readings in the History of Farming in Russia), Issue 2, Leningrad, 1925, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 253-54.

labour productivity, the development of agricultural specialisation, an expansion in commercial agriculture and a strengthening of market relations. All the signs pointed to the formation in Russia of an internal agricultural market closely linked with the world market. The framework of these markets was especially expanded by the growth of industry, towns, railways and waterways. Let us examine this, using as an example the export of grain:<sup>1</sup>

1861—1865	—	79,886,000	poods (100 per cent)
1866—1870	—	130,055,000	poods (163 per cent)
1896—1900	—	444,166,000	poods (556 per cent)

As can be seen from the data cited, both landlord and peasant farming evolved in the direction of capitalist development. From the economic point of view, this was undoubtedly of progressive significance. It is true that the process was extremely slow and painful; nevertheless, elements of the new inexorably penetrated every pore of rural economic life, gradually consolidating a dominant position in it.

By the beginning of the 20th century a new type of farming—the commodity-money economy—had established itself, supplanting natural economy at the cost of the unprecedented ruination and plundering of Russia's peasants. The former economic isolation of the countryside was destroyed and the patriarchal peasant was transformed into a commodity producer, working for the market. "Small producers are tied and subjected to the market. Out of the exchange of products arises the power of money; the conversion of agricultural produce into money is followed by the conversion of labour-power into money."<sup>2</sup>

During this period external as well as internal economic links emerged and developed. The market did its work. Pointing to its basic organising strength, Lenin wrote that by the beginning of the 20th century Russia's agriculture was completely subject to market power. The market involved Russian agriculture so strongly in commodity-money circulation that it began to determine the direction of the former's development as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> P. I. Lyashchenko, *Zernovoye khozyaistvo i khlebotorgovye otnosheniya Rossii i Germanii v svyazi s tamozhennym oblozheniem* (Grain Farming and Grain-trading Relations between Russia and Germany in Connection with Customs Dues), Petrograd, 1915, p. 51 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, Moscow, 1972, p. 296.



### 3. THE STRATIFICATION OF THE PEASANTRY AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW SOCIAL TYPES IN THE RURAL POPULATION

Lenin, drawing on economic analysis of the new agrarian relations in post-Reform Russia, gave the first scientific description of rural social differentiation in Marxist literature and showed that the involvement of the old, patriarchal peasantry in capitalist forms of agriculture and the consolidation of a new, more progressive social and economic structure in the countryside were irreversible. Despite claims by the Narodniks concerning the homogeneousness and unique character of the Russian peasantry, he revealed common patterns inherent in "every commodity economy and every capitalism". These patterns, in consolidating their domination in the countryside, were subordinating all rural socio-economic and spiritual life to their influence with inexorable force.

The post-Reform period showed clearly that, under the impact of this profound process, the peasantry of old no longer represented a single social-estate of feudal society, but had disintegrated into separate social groups. "The peasants themselves very aptly and strikingly characterise this process with the term 'depeasantising'. This process signifies the utter dissolution of the old, patriarchal peasantry and creation of *new types* of rural inhabitants."<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of comprehensive examination of statistical data on rural economic life (the distribution of sowing areas and working animals, the extent of different forms of leasing and hiring, the division of cottage industry from agriculture, the capitalisation of trades and the development of commercial agriculture) Lenin concluded that, under the impact of these factors, the two extreme social poles of the once homogeneous feudal peasant class had emerged and developed to form two new types in the rural population. Moreover, the common indicator of both these types was their single economic basis: the commodity-money character of farming.

The first new type was the rural bourgeoisie or prosperous peasantry. This type embraced those economically strong, completely independent farms which were engaged principally in commercial agriculture in all its diverse forms. The broad application of commercial and usurious operations was a characteristic feature. This type represented a class, still incompletely formed, of capitalist

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 173.

cultivators. Its main source of income was commercial operations rather than agricultural production.

Among these social categories one stratum of the peasantry (enterprising peasants), the main object of whose economic activity was agriculture—the sphere of production—began to assume separate identity. The principal indicators of this type of farming were: the purchase or leasing of land in order to increase grain production for the market, leased land coming to predominate over allotment land, the hiring of labour as a necessary condition for the growth of the prosperous peasantry, hired labour coming to predominate over the labour of members of the family; the investment of free cash in the purchase of land, implements and machinery and in farm improvement by expanded reproduction.

It was from these well-to-do peasants that the class of capitalist farmers, the peasant bourgeoisie (kulaks), began to form; this class was to replace the feudal landlord. It is true that numerically the peasant bourgeoisie then constituted a small minority of the peasantry as a whole, i.e. no more than 20 per cent of peasant households or approximately 30 per cent of the peasant population. As a rule, this correlation fluctuated markedly in different areas of Russia. "But as to their weight in the sum-total of peasant farming, in the total quantity of means of production belonging to the peasantry, in the total amount of produce raised by the peasantry, the peasant bourgeoisie are undoubtedly predominant. They are the masters of the contemporary countryside"<sup>1</sup>.

This bourgeois stratum of the countryside, constituting 20 per cent of peasant households, owned 60-70 per cent of all peasant purchased lands, controlled 50-80 per cent of all leased land and owned more than 50 per cent of the total number of peasants' horses. But that was not all. The village wealthy became the main consumers of peasant labour, the owners of industrial and commercial institutions in the village and large agricultural producers. Better tools and more advanced methods of husbandry were employed on their farms. In analysing new phenomena in Russian agriculture, Lenin concluded that "only this well-to-do minority can take a steady part in the 'progressive trends in peasant farming'"<sup>2</sup>.

The other new type, standing at the opposite pole, was the rural proletariat, the class of hired workers with land allotments. This

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 145.

was not yet a "pure", fully formed proletarian class, but it represented the mass of peasants who lived by working for hire, by selling their labour. They included peasants with tiny allotments or totally without land, owning one horse or without horses of their own—in short, those peasants whose farms were in a state of complete collapse. The farm hand, the day-labourer, the unskilled labourer and the construction or other worker were typical representatives of the rural proletariat in Russia.

Almost half of all peasant households, embracing approximately 40 per cent of the rural population, belonged to the rural proletariat. Lenin pointed out the error of those theoreticians who denied that an agricultural proletariat existed in Russia solely on the basis of the argument that capitalism required free, landless workers. Of course, in terms of assessing the basic trend of development in capitalism, this is true. But it is impossible to leave out of account the specific features of agriculture, which capitalism penetrates extremely slowly and where it is closely interlocked with many other forms. Moreover, the allotment of land to rural workers was often carried out in the interests of rural employers. The type of the agricultural proletariat with land allotments was characteristic not only of Russia but of all the capitalist countries of Europe. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that, under the conditions of Russia, the commune bound the peasant to his allotment.

Finally, the middle peasantry, from whose ranks the rural bourgeoisie and the rural proletariat were recruited, formed a third, intermediate stratum between the two, new post-Reform types of the "peasantry". This stratum, which constituted approximately 30 per cent of the peasant population, was the most enclosed and displayed the least development of the elements of a commodity economy. Lenin called it a dying stratum, occupying an extremely unstable position under the conditions of capitalist development. The economic independence of the middle peasant was only apparent: in fact middle peasants were unable in most cases to subsist on the income from their farms and were therefore compelled, as a rule, to resort to loans repaid in labour-service and to seek subsidiary ways of earning. "Every crop failure flings masses of the middle peasants into the ranks of the proletariat. In its social relations this group fluctuates between the top group, towards which it gravitates but which only a small minority of lucky ones succeed in entering, and the bottom group, into which it is pushed by the whole course of social evolution."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 181.

Thus two new classes had fully emerged in the Russian countryside by the beginning of the 20th century: the peasant bourgeoisie and the agricultural proletariat which, from different extremes, deepened the disintegration of the natural system of economy and split the mass of the peasants into social categories for the development of capitalism. Of course, the formation of a market in all these social groups of peasants proceeded in different ways. In the lowest group, i.e. the proletarian group, a market formed chiefly in consumer articles and essential goods (a personal-consumption market), since the rural proletariat could exist only by means of a market. By comparison with the middle peasantry, the rural proletariat bought far more, although it consumed less. The peasant bourgeoisie established a market in two ways: on the one hand – and predominantly – in the means of production (a market of production consumption), and, on the other hand, serving expanded personal consumption, mainly consumption of urban products, of industrial goods.

In the situation that had taken shape the peasant bourgeoisie was already essentially in a position to become complete master of the countryside. However, certain factors delayed the dissolution of the peasantry: specifically, usury and labour-service. These two social categories were the principal brake on progressive development of the countryside. "When we said above that the peasant bourgeoisie are the masters of the contemporary countryside, we disregarded the factors retarding differentiation: bondage, usury, labour-service, etc. Actually, the real masters of the contemporary countryside are often enough not the representatives of the peasant bourgeoisie, but the village usurers and the neighbouring landowners."<sup>1</sup>

The first factor delaying the class stratification of the countryside was usury, which became, under the new conditions that had emerged, a hindrance to development of the productive forces of agriculture. At an early stage, when the foundations of feudal land ownership had to be demolished, usury was a progressive and inevitable consequence of the growth of commodity-money and market relations. However, after rural capitalism developed beyond this primary stage usury became the main obstacle preventing it from gaining mastery over production activity. Therefore, Lenin wrote, "the further the development of commerce proceeds, bringing the country closer to the town, eliminating the primitive village markets and undermining the monopoly of the village shopkeeper,

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 186.

and the more there develop forms of credit that accord with European standards, displacing the village usurer, the further and deeper must the differentiation of the peasantry proceed. The capital of the well-to-do peasants, forced out of petty trade and usury, will flow more abundantly into production, whither it is already beginning to flow.”<sup>1</sup>

The other factor holding back stratification of the countryside was labour-service as a survival of the corvée. The essence of labour-service consisted in cultivation of the landlords' land with the tools and labour of the local peasants; forms of payment, whether in cash, as in piece-work hiring, or in products, as in métayage, or in land, under labour-service, did not change the fundamental nature of this system. The labour-service system was the most graphic survival of feudalism in the countryside and served most effectively as an obstacle to the development of capitalism in agriculture.

The basic support of the corvée labour-service system was represented by the farms of the middle peasantry. This obsolete system could undoubtedly not have survived so long without the conservative force represented by the middle strata of the peasantry. “Labour-service presupposes and requires the middle peasant, one who is not very affluent (otherwise he would not agree to the bondage of labour-service) but is also not a proletarian (to undertake labour-service one must have one's own implements, one must be at least in some measure a ‘sound’ peasant).”<sup>2</sup>

Usury and labour-service were not uniformly prevalent everywhere. While the strongest survivals of feudalism dominated in the agricultural area of Central-Black-Earth Russia, types of purely capitalist husbandry close to farming were widespread in the border lands, which formed an area of peasant internal colonisation. An immense role in advancing this process was played by the migrant movement, the bulk of which was made up of middle peasants. They were also involved through force of circumstances in the general stream of capitalist development.

On the basis of an enormous amount of factual data Lenin established, firstly, that the migration proceeded from the densely-populated central agricultural gubernias, where labour-service predominated, and, secondly, that the migrants were in the main fairly well-off peasants, many of whom were transformed into wage-labourers in their new homes. Those who

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 185-86.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 186.

remained in their native districts belonged principally to the extreme groups of the peasantry: the well-to-do and the proletariat. "Thus, migration is accelerating the differentiation of the peasantry in the areas of emigration and is carrying the elements of differentiation to the new places (the agricultural wage-labour of settlers in Siberia in the first period of their new life)."<sup>1</sup>

Together with the development of the production and personal consumption markets, a special type of market took shape: that of free labour, supplied by the peasantry and consumed by the agricultural bourgeoisie on their capitalised farms. As a result, an enormous reserve army of labour formed in the ranks of the peasantry. While 4.7 million passports were issued in European Russia in 1884, the number issued in 1897-1898 rose to 7.8-9.3 million. This means that in 13 years the number of peasant migrants had doubled. Hired labour began to be used on an immense scale on the farms of the rural bourgeoisie.

On the basis of profound scientific analysis Lenin revealed the complex social processes of the development in post-Reform Russia and showed convincingly that Russian capitalism was in no respect an artificial phenomenon: it had profound roots in the rural economic processes themselves. As it developed, capitalism not only established an internal market which drew the peasant farms into its orbit, but also provided a broad social basis for the class struggle of the industrial proletariat and the poor peasants.

Summing up his research into agrarian relations in post-Reform Russia, Lenin wrote that capitalism had accomplished a task of enormous importance in an historically short period. "Capitalism enormously extends and intensifies among the agricultural population the contradictions without which this mode of production cannot exist. Notwithstanding this, however, agricultural capitalism in Russia, in its historical significance, is a big progressive force."<sup>2</sup>

In what did its historically progressive mission consist?

Firstly, capitalism destroyed landownership based on social-estates, transforming land into an object to be bought and sold and giving a stimulus to the movement of landownership, and promoted an enormous influx of capital into agriculture. "...Capitalism has transformed the cultivator from a 'lord of the manor', on the one hand, and a patriarchal, dependent peasant, on the other,

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 313.

Новая экономическая политика  
в крестьянской жизни.

Из работы курса В. Е. Носовского -  
 "Новая экономическая политика".

I

Введение к работе по курсу В. Е. Носовского -  
 "Новая экономическая политика" (Москва, 1891 г. Сп. XXV + 391) представляет из себя разработку работы "экономическое значение крестьянской жизни в условиях Мажарской, Германской, Французской, английской и в немецкой (сравнительно) жизни Мажарской жизни. Анализ и оценка, в 1; - "экономическое значение - на основании сравнительного изучения жизни в Мажарской, Германской, Французской, английской и в немецкой жизни; в 2; на основании сравнительного изучения, проведенного и на основании и на основании, от."

1. Этот анализ основан на данных, полученных в Мажарской жизни.

Lenin's New Economic Developments in Peasant Life. First page of the manuscript.  
 1893

into the same sort of industrialist that every other proprietor is in present-day society."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ibid.

Secondly, agricultural capitalism destroyed the natural enclosedness of agriculture, wresting it from the prison of medievalism and patriarchal stagnation. It transformed agriculture into a commercial activity with a ramified system of specialisation, directing its development towards intensification and the service of market relations. "...Agricultural capitalism has for the first time undermined the age-old stagnation of our agriculture; it has given a tremendous impetus to the transformation of its technique, and to the development of the productive forces of social labour. A few decades of 'destructive work' by capitalism have done more in this respect than entire centuries of preceding history."<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, capitalism changed not only the form of landownership but also the very character of agriculture, establishing large-scale agricultural production involving the application of improved implements and machinery and the extensive hiring of labour in Russia for the first time. This was a new type of farming, developing on the basis of expanded reproduction and closely linked to the internal and external markets. Of course, farming by landlords also represented large-scale agriculture; however, it depended on the forced labour of the peasants, the primitive implements of the latter and the principle of natural exchange. Capitalism destroyed the immobility of the peasant population, swept away divisions of rank and the peasants' attachment to their places of dwelling and provided broad scope for the resettling of enormous masses of the population throughout the entire country. Capitalism "replaces the minute medieval divisions among cultivators by a major division, embracing the whole nation, that divides them into classes occupying different positions in the general system of capitalist economy"<sup>2</sup>

Fourthly, capitalism undermined medieval labour-service and destroyed the corvée system and the personal dependence of the peasant upon the landlord. "...agricultural capitalism in Russia has performed a great historical service in replacing labour-service by hired labour."<sup>3</sup>

However, while indicating the historically progressive role of capitalism in agriculture, Lenin invariably stressed its historically transitory character: as it develops, capitalism more rapidly creates the conditions for its own demise and for the establishment of the most progressive social system, the name of which is socialism.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 317.



## CHAPTER II

# THE INFLUENCE OF MARXISM IN AWAKENING THE REVOLUTIONARY-DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA

### 1. ADVANCED SOCIAL THOUGHT: THE LEADING FORCE IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

The entire course of human history provides convincing testimony that genuine economic progress is conceivable only in close conjunction with social progress. These two phenomena, merging into a single process, stimulate to action not only broad groups of the intelligentsia but also the enormous mass of the working class and the peasantry. In the course of this immense transforming movement their intellectual horizon broadens, political and class-consciousness grows and new forms and methods of struggle aimed at destroying all kinds of social and spiritual oppression are perfected. This was true earlier and is happening in our time as well.

History teaches us that, where economic progress has not been accompanied by social progress, it has come to a halt and not been given room to grow. Conversely, when economic and social progress have been combined, the productive forces, science, technology and culture have advanced rapidly and society has undergone progressive reform. Just as technical and economic advance combined with social progress once brought about the downfall of feudalism and the consolidation of capitalism, so subsequently these profound social and economic processes led to the destruction of capitalist production relations and the establishment of socialist relations, with which the lives of more than a third of the world's inhabitants are now linked.

What magical force advances the development of human society? This motive force is, beyond question, the development of the productive forces and the production relations of people. At the same time, advanced social thought remains the principal lever in the great processes of reform. While itself representing the direct product of social development, it has simultaneously elevated,

inspired and accelerated the latter, opening up new avenues and prospects for it. This was especially evident in the leading influence exercised on the course of social development by such major phenomena as the British classical political economy of the 17th century, French 18th-century utopian socialism, German classical philosophy of the 19th century and the Russian revolutionary-democratic enlightenment of the 19th century.

Scientific and technical discoveries influence social processes through changes in the social consciousness of people and in their views on nature, society and the development of the productive forces. History shows that advanced social thought occupies a key position in this historical process. Advanced social thought acts as a battering ram in the development of society, preparing the ground for and promoting technical, economic and social progress.

The transition from feudalism to capitalism and, equally, the transition from capitalism to socialism, were organically linked not only to technical and economic progress but also to the revolution in the social field and the field of ideas. New, advanced ideas were born of the conflict between the growing productive forces and obsolescent production relations, mobilising people to struggle against these outmoded relations. New social ideas and theories precede social revolution and constitute one of its conditions. The appearance of new social theories and their perception, the implementation of scientific advances in the material sphere of production and the reform of social relations are all, consequently, no more than different aspects of a single process accelerating the progressive development of society.

Advanced social thought has always played a leading role in all major social reforms and, in particular, in the course of great revolutions. Advanced social ideas mobilise and organise people to revolutionary actions, while people create history, including the history of science. Ideological revolution prepares the ground for and promotes technical, economic and social progress.

Let us take, for example, 18th-century feudal France, which had been locked for many years in a state of stagnation. What impelled it forward towards progress and civilisation? Unquestionably, advanced social thought, and, above all, the Enlighteners and materialist Encyclopedists Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Holbach and Helvétius. As bearers of the advanced theories of their time, they answered to a significant extent the complex questions brought to the fore by the historical development of the country. The upsurge in social thought promoted the growth of the natural

and technical sciences and increased political activity by the masses. It prepared the ground for economic progress and the great social revolution. As a specific result of this, France was transformed in a relatively short period into one of the most powerful and influential countries of Europe.

The same is true of Germany which, at the beginning of the last century, was a fragmented feudal state. What impelled it forward? Once again, advanced social thought. The German enlightenment of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was represented by Lessing, Schiller, Goethe and Heine. The classical German philosophy, progressive for its time, of Kant, Schelling, Hegel and Feuerbach stimulated the awakening of social activity in Germany, which also promoted the creation and consolidation of a centralised German state.

And what awoke Russia? The same advanced social thought, represented by revolutionaries from the nobility—the Decembrists—the first revolutionary-democrats, an entire galaxy of enlighteners, the revolutionary Narodniks of the 19th century and later the great Leninist Party of Bolsheviks. The spread of Marxism and the ideas of Lenin brought to life the most powerful social and political forces of the country, which was slumbering in the grip of tsarism. These ideas moved Russia along the path of technical, economic and social progress in such a way that Russia became the motherland of Leninism, the homeland of victorious socialism and the embodiment of world progress and civilisation in the modern age.

From the very moment of its emergence Marxist teaching exercised a stronger and more overwhelming influence in Russia than anywhere else in Europe. In essence not a single outstanding Russian progressive figure adhering to one of the various political schools would have been unfamiliar with the classic works of the founders of scientific communism—and this was not fortuitous.

The doctrine of Marxism is omnipotent because it is true. It is omnipotent because it expresses the fundamental interests of the working class—the most advanced, most organised and most reforming and ascendant class. It is true because it represents the scientific expression and generalisation of advanced social thought and the entire wealth of ideas accumulated by mankind throughout its entire history.

Marxist teaching has especial importance for Russia because it was to the Russian working class that the great honour of being first in the world to implement the revolutionary ideas of Marxism and first to translate into reality its great liberating mission fell. In

recalling this historic feat of the Russian proletariat, we should never forget what is most important: that victory was won as the result of an extremely hard and bloody liberation struggle which was unique in its historical importance. We shall never forget the heartfelt words of Lenin, about the necessity for the class struggle, hatred for oppressors and boundless love for those struggling for the cause of their native people: "Russia achieved Marxism—the only correct revolutionary theory—through the *agony* she experienced in the course of half a century of unparalleled torment and sacrifice, of unparalleled revolutionary heroism, incredible energy, devoted searching, study, practical trial..."<sup>1</sup>

Protracted, self-sacrificing struggle carried away thousands and thousands of staunch, gifted sons and daughters of the working class, the toiling peasantry and the progressive intelligentsia, men and women utterly devoted to the cause of revolution. However, new legions of fighters took the place of those who fell under the banners of Marxism-Leninism. The men and women vividly termed the "helmsmen of the future storm" by the outstanding revolutionary-democrat Herzen were formed and tempered in cruel class battles.

The revolutionary forces of Russia grew and consolidated themselves immeasurably after the creation by Lenin of a Party of a new type, the Party of the Bolsheviks. "As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed since 1903."<sup>2</sup> The Communist Party is a truly Marxist party, whose ideological roots lie in the International Working Men's Association founded by Marx and Engels more than 100 years ago. The strength of Lenin's Party lies in the fact that it has absorbed the vast theoretical and practical experience of the international communist and workers' movement, becoming by right the party which embodies in the highest sense of the word the true internationalism of all peoples and nations.

The sacred goal of the Party was to implement revolutionary reform of society and to consolidate the new, socialist system, free from private ownership of the instruments and means of production, exploiters and the exploitation of man by man. However, the Party was well aware that this new society could not replace the old, capitalist society, rent by acute class contradictions, as a gradual, spontaneous, unorganised development. Therefore, in

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Communism—an Infantile Disorder", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, Moscow, 1974, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

order to achieve the sacred goal a high level of organisation, solidarity, ideological conviction and temperedness has always been required of the communist vanguard.

Mankind can only be pleased by the fact that the history of social development proceeds steadily in accordance with the scientific laws discovered by the classic authors of Marxism-Leninism. Bourgeois ideologists attempt to present the teaching of Marx and Engels as a nihilistic denial of all preceding social thought. In fact, as Lenin pointed out, "the genius of Marx consists precisely in his having furnished answers to questions already raised by the foremost minds of mankind. His doctrine emerged as the direct and immediate *continuation* of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy and socialism".<sup>1</sup>

How, then, did advanced social thought take shape and develop in Russia and how did it influence the course of social and economic development at the most crucial moment of the country's transition from one socio-economic formation to another, i.e. from feudalism to capitalism?

The outstanding role of three generations of revolutionaries, who turned the country on to the path of progress and civilisation, will always occupy especial prominence in the history of the development of advanced social thought among the peoples of Russia. The seeds cast on fertile soil by the courageous enlightener and militant A. N. Radishchev yielded remarkable fruit—the entire galaxy of revolutionary Decembrists from the nobility. Although their circle was narrow and they were too far removed from the life of the people, the Decembrists were, nevertheless, honest patriots and advanced, highly educated representatives of their age. Their chief merit was to awaken the advanced social forces of Russia and initiate the progressive movement in the country. No less important was their role in being first to raise two major socio-political problems: the abolition of serfdom and the destruction of slavery and ignorance in Russia; and the elimination of absolute monarchy and the establishment of a republican system.

A quite short period was required for a second, more powerful, better organised generation of revolutionaries to arise, a generation formed of members of the advanced *raznochinets*<sup>2</sup> intelligentsia. During the dark years of tsarist despotism in the middle of the 19th century an ideology took shape in Russia which

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, Moscow, 1968, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Intellectuals not belonging to the gentry in 19th century Russia.

expressed the class interests of the peasantry. This emerged as an independent current of socio-political thought under the name "revolutionary democracy". A detailed programme of socio-economic reforms and of tactics for their implementation was drawn up by the revolutionary-democrats in the late 1850s and early 1860s. This important socio-political movement was led by N. G. Chernyshevsky and A. I. Herzen.

The emergence of revolutionary democracy was an outstanding stage in the development of advanced revolutionary thought and the entire liberation movement in Russia. Revolutionary-democrats raised progressive social ideas to a high level, thus going further than their predecessors. In correcting the error of the Decembrists concerning "general prosperity", Chernyshevsky wrote that this was not at all a matter of proclaiming slogans of liberty and equality but meant destroying that "social order, under which nine-tenths of the people are slaves and proletarians"; it is not a matter of whether there will be a tsar or not or whether there will be a constitution or not, but of ensuring in social relations that one class does not suck the blood of another".<sup>1</sup> Lenin rated highly this dialectical and thoroughly Marxist thesis concerning the patterns of social development in Russia.

The agrarian and peasant question occupied a central place in the theoretical views and practical activity of the revolutionary-democrats. In these we can see all aspects of the struggle to emancipate the peasantry and eliminate the feudal tyranny of the landlords. The revolutionary-democrats provided highly valuable revelatory material as well as substantiating the case for immediate elimination of serfdom as the main condition for saving Russia from the inevitable demise that would otherwise result from its technical, economic and cultural backwardness. They showed in terms of feudal relations themselves the constricting and stifling effect of the latter on all sides of social life and correctly revealed the objective, historical necessity and inevitability of smashing obsolete existing relations.

The second generation of revolutionaries laid a foundation strong enough to enable the broadest horizons for extending mass, popular, class-sustained struggle to be opened up. The banner of victory, red with the blood of two preceding generations of revolutionaries, was raised high by the third generation of revolutionaries, whose ranks were filled by the advanced intelligentsia,

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<sup>1</sup> N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1939, p. 110 (in Russian).

workers and peasants. It fell to the lot of this generation of proletarian fighters to carry the cause begun by their predecessors to full and final victory. "The emancipation movement in Russia has passed through three main stages, corresponding to the three main classes of Russian society, which have left their impress on the movement: 1 the period of the nobility, roughly from 1825 to 1861; 2 the *raznochintsy* or bourgeois-democratic period, approximately from 1861 to 1895; and 3 the proletarian period, from 1895 to the present time."<sup>1</sup>

In speaking of the continuity of Russia's three generations of revolutionaries, we should keep in mind that while all three pursued the same goal—that of the progressive development of Russia—they understood it in different ways; all directed their efforts to the good of the people, but followed different paths and conceived of the aims of the liberation struggle in different ways. This is explained by the fact that each political current functioned within a concrete internal historical situation, under the conditions of its age, and each of them was influenced by different external social ideas.

The first generation of revolutionaries and its leaders were under the irresistible influence of the ideas and events of the great French bourgeois revolution of the 18th century. The second generation of revolutionaries was heavily influenced by the ideas of utopian socialism and the philosophical views of German classical philosophy. The third generation of revolutionaries was wholly formed in the spirit of Marxist, scientific socialist doctrine, which it upheld through three revolutions. The third generation of revolutionaries made use of the best bequeathed them by the generations of their predecessors.

A mission of immense importance—that of destroying the old feudal system and ending serfdom—fell to the first two generations of revolutionaries. They accomplished this task with brilliant success. Their great victory created the conditions for achieving the second grand objective: that of overthrowing the monarchy, destroying the bourgeoisie and establishing a genuinely democratic, popular republican system. The third generation of revolutionaries was to carry out this historic task.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "From the History of the Workers' Press in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, Moscow, 1972, p. 245.

## 2. THE PROGRESSIVE CHARACTER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY NARODNIKS' AGRARIAN VIEWS AND THE REACTIONARY NATURE OF THEIR SUCCESSORS

The Reform of 1861 was a watershed not only in Russia's economic development but also in its entire social and political life. It was historically important because it initiated a profound demarcation of the country's social forces, advancing the most progressive elements of the radical intelligentsia to vanguard positions in the revolutionary struggle. This was the same kernel from which later sprang an entire galaxy of outstanding revolutionaries, who did battle against the "omnipotent" autocracy.

In the minds of the progressive section of Russian society the reform illuminated the true goals of landlord-monarchical legislation in their totality and dispelled in a flash all those hopes which had been nurtured among the people during the preparation of this legislation. Now everything fell into place: that which had been secret became clear and what had been promised proved to be a lie. Feudal tyranny was replaced by a new slavery: economic bondage, long-term obligations and collective responsibility.

The new situation hastened the historical process of Russia's social development and brought an entire generation of revolutionaries into the field of political struggle, confronting them directly with the autocracy and the entire landlord-monarchical system. A major political current, Narodism (populism), the motto of which was "Land and Freedom", took organisational shape under the influence of widespread revolutionary-democratic ideas.

S. M. Stepnyak-Kravchinsky, a leading figure in revolutionary Narodism during the 1870s, wrote in his famous work *Underground Russia* that the great revolutionary-democrats Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov and Herzen were the first to raise the banner of struggle. Later, two great events—the establishment of the First International and the Paris Commune—had an enormous influence on revolutionary thought in Russia. Stepnyak-Kravchinsky wrote in connection with these events: "A powerful new wave from abroad soon joined with these Russian currents. Its source was the International Working Men's Association, which attained its greatest strength in the course of the years immediately following the Paris Commune". Elsewhere the author noted: "With the Paris Commune, the ominous explosion of which shook the entire civilised world, Russian socialism entered the militant phase of its



development, moving from studies and private meetings into the villages and workshops".<sup>1</sup>

In the course of its evolution Narodism traversed a complex, contradictory path full of heroism and courage, hopes and disappointment, upsurge and decline. From being a progressive, genuinely revolutionary-democratic trend during the 1860s-1870s, Narodism turned during the 1880-1890s into a backward, reactionary movement that was ultimately destined to vanish from the political stage.

*A. The Agrarian Theories of the Revolutionary Narodniks and Their Historical Role in the Progressive Development of Russia*

From the 1860s the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia waged a hard, heroic and self-sacrificing struggle for the happiness of the people and the interests of the toiling peasantry. They proclaimed to Russia their fidelity to the great cause of liberating the people and their determination to carry this sacred struggle to a victorious conclusion.

The emergence of Narodism was a turning-point in the social and political development of Russia, marking the beginning of the struggle under the great and noble banner of liberating the people. This process was very graphically reflected in the book *Underground Russia*. "The movement," its author wrote, "broke out simultaneously in different places and was simply a necessary result of Russia's situation viewed in the light of the socialist ideas sowed among the Russian intelligentsia by Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Herzen and others".<sup>2</sup>

However, Russian Narodism which came into being under the strong influence of the ideas of utopian socialism, was not a united, purposeful, consistent political movement. Its development proceeded in two directions—liberal-democratic and revolutionary-democratic—from the outset. These two offshoots sprang from a single root: utopian socialism. Of course, they had much in common, although great, fundamental differences also existed between them. As Russia's economic and socio-political development accelerated, these differences increased, ultimately turning into the direct opposite of each other.

<sup>1</sup> S. Stepnyak-Kravchinsky, *Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1958, pp. 374, 377 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 376.

*The first ideological trend in Narodism was liberal-democratic. Based on a number of weak sides of the theoretical and political conceptions of A. I. Herzen, the great revolutionary-democrat, this trend nourished great hopes for the reformist path of developing Russia. Herzen initially displayed inconsistency, wavering between liberalism and democracy. In substantiating the possibility of a non-capitalist path of development for Russia, he was the first to laud the Russian village commune, which he regarded as the nucleus of socialist development of the countryside, and the Russian peasant, considered by Herzen to be an innate socialist, capable by his strength of erecting a socialist system in Russia. These ideas were discussed in detail in Kolokol (The Bell), the renowned magazine published by Herzen in London, which had enormous influence among the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia of the 1860s. It is to Herzen that the motto "Land and Freedom" belongs: these words were to become the battle cry of Russian Narodism.*

In the summer of 1861 the Russian revolutionary poet N. P. Ogarev published a number of articles in *Kolokol* (The Bell) under the heading "Analysis of the New Feudal Law Promulgated on February 19, 1861, in the Statute on Peasants Who have Emerged from Feudal Dependence". These articles were an angry exposure of landlord-monarchical reform. In concluding his analysis Ogarev wrote: "The old feudal law has been replaced by a new feudal law. In general terms, *serfdom has not been abolished. The people have been deceived by the tsar!*"<sup>1</sup>

After criticising the land legislation of the tsarist government, Herzen proposed a quite moderate agrarian programme in issue No. 102 of *Kolokol* for 1861 under the title "What do the People Need?" The article opened with the author's answer to this question. "Very simply, the people need land and liberty. The people cannot live without land and cannot be left without land, for the land is their own, vital. *The land belongs to no one else other than the people...* Since distant ages the people have in fact owned the land, in fact poured sweat and blood on the land, but clerks writing on paper signed away this land to landlords and to the tsar's treasury".<sup>2</sup>

The programme for emancipating the peasants was formulated in the following words: "To declare that all peasants are free with

<sup>1</sup> *Kolokol* (The Bell), Issue 4 (1861), Moscow, 1962, p. 848, No. 101, 15.VI.1861.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 853, No. 102, I.VII. 1861.

the land which they now own. Those who are without land, for example, manor serfs and certain factory serfs, to be given plots from state, that is, people's, land as yet unoccupied by anyone. Landlord's peasants without sufficient land to be given additional land from the landlords or to be given land for new settlements. This to be done in such a way that not a single peasant is left without a sufficient quantity of land. Land is to be owned by the peasants jointly, i.e. in communes. When too many people are born in a particular commune, so that it becomes crowded, that commune is to be given as much land as is needed for new settlements for the peasants from convenient vacant land".<sup>1</sup>

Herzen's agrarian programme essentially provided for the fulfilment of two conditions: expansion of peasant land use and the consolidation of communal landholding. Clearly, the programme was very moderate; moreover, moderate implementation of it was also proposed, involving various concessions on the part of the tsar and the landlords and even admitting the possibility of reimbursing landlords from the treasury for the sequestration of their land. It is true that Herzen subsequently broke completely with these liberal illusions. Adopting a consistently revolutionary-democratic standpoint, he called upon the peasants "to overthrow the oppression ruling over them".

*The other ideological trend in Narodism was revolutionary-democratic, imbued with the spirit of peasant struggle and firmly aimed at destruction of large estates and the entire monarchical system.* The great thinker, fearless fighter and enlightener N. G. Chernyshevsky stood at the head of this movement. He was the first revolutionary of his time to reveal in depth the class essence of the landlord-monarchical state and to show the inevitability of its downfall. The old, hateful world and the army that defends it, he wrote, "will be destroyed by the power of the people's volunteer corps; they will melt in face of the people's anger like wax before a fire".<sup>2</sup>

In *Letters without an Address* he boldly and openly showed the predatory and fraudulent character of the "emancipating" reform:

"...The result was that, while the forms of relations between landlords and peasants were changed, there was a very minor, almost imperceptible change in the essence of the former relations."<sup>3</sup> Feu-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 854.

<sup>2</sup> N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Collected Works*, Vol. VI, Moscow, 1949, p. 370 (in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. X, Moscow, 1951, p. 99.

dalism on the whole remained, despite the proclamation of its abolition. But Chernyshevsky did not only harshly expose the landlord-monarchical reform: he also laid down ways of solving the peasant question with an insight brilliantly perceptive for the time and foretold the future development of the Russian countryside. After profound analysis of the development of the Russian land commune, he concluded that it could become the basis for socialist rural development only if the monarchical state and large estates were eliminated and a democratic, republican system established in which state power was transferred into the hands of the working people.

In the light of such an ultimate outcome to the revolutionary transformation of Russia, Chernyshevsky considered nationalisation of land to be the best form of landholding. His views coincided wholly with those of Marx in this respect. Shortly before the 1861 Reform he wrote: "That form of land ownership is best for successful agriculture that combines proprietor, master and worker in one person. Of all forms of ownership, state ownership with communal possession conforms best to this ideal".<sup>1</sup> He considered, moreover, that, given the establishment of this form of ownership, Russia, depending on the peasant commune, could bypass the capitalist phase of development and move rapidly and directly towards the highest phase of social development—to socialism.

Chernyshevsky's revolutionary-democratic ideas were set forth in proclamations to the people issued by his faithful followers. *To the Younger Generation*, his first proclamation, which appeared in September 1861, stated that the reform had been carried out against the interests of the people and that "the monarch has deceived the expectations of the people—he has given the people an illusory freedom, not that which it dreamed of and which it needs".<sup>2</sup> The proclamation further contained a brief but quite clear formulation of ideas for an agrarian programme. "We want the land to belong not to a person but to the country; we want every commune to have its own allotment, we want there to be no personal landowners, we want it to be impossible to sell land as potatoes and cabbages are sold; we want every citizen ... to be able to become a member of an agricultural commune.... We want

<sup>1</sup> N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, Moscow, 1948, p. 434 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *Proklamazii shestidesyatykh godov* (Proclamations of the 1860s), Moscow-Leningrad, 1926, p. 42 (in Russian).

the preservation of communal possession of land with re-allotment, at long intervals".<sup>1</sup>

*Young Russia*, another proclamation issued in the spring of 1862, formulates an agrarian programme more concretely, describing the future agrarian system in the country. "Each region should consist of agricultural communes, all members of which should enjoy equal rights... The land allotted to each member of the commune is given him not for life-long use but only for a certain number of years, at the expiry of which the land is re-allotted by the mir. All other property of commune members remains inviolable during their lifetime, but becomes the property of the commune at their deaths."<sup>2</sup>

It is worthy of note that both these documents not only indicated ways of solving the agrarian problem but also outlined the most revolutionary methods of struggle to achieve the goal set. In expressing a sharply negative attitude towards the autocratic empire, the authors of the proclamations identified it with the landlord class, pointing out that the emperor's strength derived solely from the landlords. The proclamations indicated the two main enemies of the toiling peasantry: the emperor and the landlords. The struggle against these enemies had, therefore, to be merciless. Russia was on the verge of great upheavals; a "bloody and inexorable revolution" would inevitably occur and the slogan on its banner would be "Long live the Russian social and democratic republic!"<sup>3</sup>

It was the virtue of the revolutionary-democrats to have limitless faith in a revolution that would shake old Russia to its foundations, overthrow the rule of the tsar, the landlords and the noblemen and transfer power into the hands of a revolutionary party which would implement the great cause of socialism. "It may happen," stated the proclamation *Young Russia*, "that the entire matter will be confined to destruction of the imperial family, that is of a hundred or so people, but it may also happen, and this is more likely, that the entire imperial party will take its stand behind the monarch as one man, for the question will be one of its continued existence. ...In that case strike the imperial party with as little mercy as it shows us now...."<sup>4</sup>

These words not only expressed anger and hatred for the tsar

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 61, 69.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68.

and the landlords but also defined the political course of the struggle, calling upon the people to undertake decisive actions to achieve their own liberation. Instead of reforms, the agenda now included popular revolution and decisive measures directed against landlord-monarchical dominance and aimed at opening the way towards a democratic social structure and the establishment of a revolutionary, republican system in Russia.

The idea of communal landholding was a keystone of the revolutionary Narodniks' theoretical views and lay at the basis of the agrarian programmes of all revolutionary organisations at that time. Despite discord among various Narodnik trends, they were all convinced that Russia could follow a special path of economic development, depending on the peasant commune and emancipation of the peasantry.

M. A. Bakunin, a leading figure in the revolutionary movement of the 1870s and the founder of anarchism in Russia, wrote in his work *The State and Anarchism* of the three main features that lie at the basis of the Russian popular ideal. "The first and main feature is the conviction of all the people that the land, all the land, belongs to the people, which waters it with its sweat and fertilizes it with the labour of its own hands. The second feature just as important is that the right to use the land belongs not to an individual but to an entire commune, a mir, which divides it up temporarily among individuals; the third feature ... is quasi-absolute autonomy, communal self-government and, in consequence of this, a resolutely hostile attitude by the commune towards the state."<sup>1</sup>

P. L. Lavrov, another leading Narodnik theoretician and author of the renowned *Historical Letters*, also attached paramount importance to communal landholding, from which an agrarian socialist system was supposed subsequently to develop. In the magazine *Vperyod!* (Forward!), which Lavrov published in Zurich and London, ideas of agrarian reform in Russia were extensively elaborated. In the first issue of 1873 the magazine formulated the programme of the Lavrovists as follows: "For the Russian the special ground upon which the future of the majority of the Russian population can develop in the way indicated by the common objectives of our time is the peasantry, coupled with

<sup>1</sup> M. A. Bakunin, *Polnoye sobranie sochinenii* t. 2 (Collected Works), St. Petersburg, 1906, pp. 250-251 (in Russian). These ideas were also developed in the magazine *Narodnoye Delo* (The People's Cause), published by Bakunin and Zhukovsky in Geneva. In a programme article printed in the first issue of 1868 agrarian policy was formulated in the following words: "The land belongs only to those who cultivate it with their own hands—to the agricultural communes".

communal landholding. To develop our commune in the sense of communal land cultivation and communal use of its products, to make the gathering of the mir the basic political element of the Russian social system and to swallow up private property in communal ownership ... these are especially Russian goals, which every Russian wanting the advance of his homeland must promote".<sup>1</sup>

A similar but more left-wing programme was advanced by *Nabat* (Tocsin), the organ of the Russian Jacobins, which was founded and edited by P. Tkachev (1875). It expressed the aim of revolution in the following words: "After consolidating its power the revolutionary state, relying on the People's Duma and making extensive use of propaganda, will carry out a social revolution by means of a number of reforms in the economic, political and legal relations of society—reforms whose general character must consist: 1) in the gradual transformation of the contemporary peasant commune, which is based on the principle of temporary private possession, into a commune basing itself on the principle of common, joint use of the implements of production and common, joint labour; 2) in gradual expropriation of the implements of production in private possession and their transfer to common use...."<sup>2</sup>

Without embarking upon particular critical analysis of these agrarian programmes, we shall merely point out that all were the result of a passionate search for correct ways of solving the agrarian problem and, for the time, undoubtedly reflected the progressive ideas of advanced social forces in Russia. They were historically valuable in that, under the banner of these programmes, the best, progressive forces of the Russian intelligentsia joined ranks. During the 1870s a quite broad network of Narodnik organisations existed in Russia. Although the methods and means of struggle of all these trends differed, their agrarian ideas were fundamentally similar, since they sprang from a single root—utopian socialism.

"When it first arose, in its original form, it was a fairly well-knit theory: starting from the view of a specific way of life of the people, it believed in the communist instincts of the 'communal' peasant and for that reason regarded the peasantry as a natural fighter for socialism. But it lacked theoretical elaboration and confirmation in the facts of Russian life, on the one hand, and expe-

<sup>1</sup> *Vperyod!* (Forward!) *Neperiodicheskoye obozrenie* (An occasional review), Vol. 1, Zurich, 1873, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Nabat* (Tocsin), organ of the Russian revolutionaries, 1875, No. 1, pp. 4-5.

rience in applying a political programme based on these assumed qualities of the peasant, on the other."<sup>1</sup>

• Three main conclusions may be drawn from the documents cited: firstly, revolutionary-democrats most emphatically condemned the so-called "emancipation reform", showing that it was implemented in the interests of feudal landlords and the monarchical state; secondly, they came boldly to the defence of the toiling peasantry, taking upon themselves the historic mission of fighters for true emancipation of the peasantry and substantiating the principle of the peasant commune as the future nucleus of socialist rural development; thirdly, revolutionary-democrats spoke out in favour of solving the peasant problem by force through popular revolution and the establishment of a democratic republic.

These three basic theses run through the entire literary activity and propaganda of revolutionary Narodism during the 1860s-1870s. "Faith in a special order, in the communal system of Russian life; hence—faith in the possibility of a peasant socialist revolution—that is what inspired them and roused dozens and hundreds of people to wage a heroic struggle against the government."<sup>2</sup>

### *B. The Evolution of the Revolutionary Democracy of the Narodniks and Their Transformation into Ideologists of the Peasant Bourgeoisie*

Under the impact of new social and economic processes, accompanied by the profound dissolution of the natural economy and the old, patriarchal peasantry, the Narodnik theory and with it petty-bourgeois peasant socialism suffered inevitable collapse: This collapse began with the split of the Land and Freedom party, a large, centralised and formerly well-organised and highly united body, at the Voronezh congress of 1878. The party fell apart and, as a result, two independent political parties—People's Will and General Redistribution—were formed.

The members of the People's Will, having lost faith in the effectiveness of Land and Freedom's rebellious propaganda among the peasants, threw themselves into a terroristic duel with the autocracy. They rejected hopes of achieving socialism by peaceful

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1963, pp. 275-76.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 263-64.



means, abandoning the peasant commune as a revolutionary support. Having thus "corrected" the error of Land and Freedom concerning the naturally socialist qualities of the peasant, People's Will committed another, still more pernicious error in renouncing the organisation of mass political struggle and losing faith in revolutionary action by the masses. Despite these mistakes, Lenin valued highly the noble acts, heroism, unbending determination and self-sacrifice of the People's Will in the name of the people.

The members of *General Redistribution* still nourished the hope of raising the peasant masses to nation-wide rebellion through patient and persistent propaganda of socialist ideas and of decisively demolishing the old, feudal relations in the countryside. They believed in the strength of the peasant struggle and the revolutionary energy of the peasantry. These remarkable revolutionary-democratic features of the members of General Redistribution were also rated highly by Lenin in his works on the agrarian question.

It should be noted that, despite the split in the Narodnik revolutionary party, Narodism nevertheless retained its revolutionary-democratic principles at this historical stage. However, under the impact of the objective laws of social and economic development it gradually gave way to a new and constantly growing scientific socialist ideology and its disintegration henceforth proceeded at an accelerated rate.

The following factor, which was of truly historic importance, marked a turning-point in the development of social thought in Russia. After re-examining their former views, the most progressive section of the General Redistribution revolutionary Narodniks, led by G. V. Plekhanov, adopted the standpoint of scientific socialism, establishing the first Marxist organisation—Emancipation of Labour—in 1883. The move from obsolete concepts to new, advanced, truly scientific concepts was very difficult and painful and credit should be given to the courage and unbounded fidelity to the people of these first pioneers of Marxism in Russia.

Other Narodnik figures, while remaining honest fighters, lost their insight into the nature of the new age's social processes and found themselves left behind by progressive social development. Having renounced their former revolutionary-democratic ideas, these Narodniks retained only their old name while becoming in fact ideologists of the petty peasant bourgeoisie. The bankruptcy of these Narodnik trends was not fortuitous, but the objective outcome of social development.

In evaluating the historical roots of these two Narodnik political trends, Lenin pointed out that they trace their inception to the

first Russian socialists of the 1860s, who believed in the peculiar, communal structure of Russian life and in the possibility of peasant socialist revolution. However, under the influence of capitalist development in Russia this peasant socialism subsequently split, giving way to working-class socialism, on the one hand, and degenerating into vulgar philistine radicalism, on the other. Instead of spurring the peasantry to struggle for the destruction of the outdated medieval landlord-monarchical system, as the Russian revolutionaries of the 1860s had dreamed, the radical petty-bourgeois came to the defence of this system. "From a political programme calculated *to arouse the peasantry* for the socialist revolution *against the foundations of modern society* there has emerged a programme calculated to patch up, to 'improve' the conditions of the peasantry while preserving the foundations of modern society."<sup>1</sup>

The central thesis in the political programme of the liberal Narodniks during the 1890s involved defining the nature of post-Reform Russia's social and political development. Had Russia taken the path of capitalist development and did it have to follow this path?—such was the central problem advanced by the ideologists of Narodism for solution by social thought. Lenin regarded the statement of this question as a major step forward by comparison with the Narodniks of the 1860s, who, because of objective circumstances, were unable to advance this question. However, the liberal Narodniks failed to answer it correctly, displaying a misunderstanding of the laws of social development and adopting an extremely reactionary standpoint on this issue.

Unable to deny the increased penetration by capitalism of Russia's economy, the Narodniks of the 1890s rated this as a decline, a regression, a deviation from the path supposedly prescribed by the entire historical life of the nation and sanctified by age-old principles, etc. In spite of the objective character of this historical process, they considered it sufficient to stand athwart the road in order to stop the advance of capitalism and dissolve it in the old, feudal society. Narodnik ideologists proposed this course principally for use in the countryside, since capitalism there had the most corrupting impact, putting forward the peasant commune as a means of defence and striving to turn it into a strong point against the penetration of capitalism into agriculture. S. N. Yuzhakov, a prominent Narodnik theoretician, compared Russia with

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "What the Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 264-65.

"a house on fire" and proposed means of "putting out the blaze", one of which was the consolidation of commune landholding. The development of capitalism in agriculture, he wrote, could only be prevented by the growth of "a prosperous, enlightened and self-governing rural commune", which would block the separation of agriculture from the processing industry and of producers from the means of production.

N. F. Danielson, another leading Narodnik theoretician, asserted that, without the peasant commune, Russia was threatened with inevitable destruction.<sup>1</sup>

The Narodniks defended the old, patriarchal stagnation, failing to notice the living evidence of progressive development and repeating that they would faithfully preserve the national traditions of Russian communal landholding. "We are also pleased by the fact that universal human features of character and organisation (the *artel* spirit, the commune), which other peoples have long since lost and which they will have to win back, have been preserved in our country to the present day",<sup>2</sup> wrote the Narodnik V. Vorontsov.

The Narodniks consoled themselves with the thought that it was not too late to "correct" the course of history. It is curious that, initially, they laid all blame for the economic break-down occurring in Russia at the feet of those who had drawn up the reform measures and directed Russia's agriculture along the capitalist path "without foreseeing" all the destructive consequences this would have for the countryside. Later, they began to accuse the Marxists of having, by their theoretical views, supposedly accelerated the development of capitalism in agriculture, thereby "betraying" the working people.

In reality the liberal Narodniks completely failed to understand the social character of the Reform and the historical processes of social development. Armed with a subjectivist sociology, they began to appeal now to the intelligentsia, now to society, now to the government, calculating with their "all-powerful" aid to correct "historical injustice" and save the peasant commune and so-called popular production from the onslaught of capitalism, which they saw as an "artificial" grafting made by particular forces.

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolai-on (N. F. Danielson), *Ocherki nashego poreformennogo obshchestvennogo khozyaistva* (Notes on Our Post-Reform Social Economy), St. Petersburg, 1893, p. 344 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> V. V. Vorontsov, *Sudby kapitalizma v Rossii* (The Fate of Capitalism in Russia), St. Petersburg, 1882, p. 274 (in Russian).

How did the Narodniks intend to save the peasant commune from pernicious capitalist disintegration? A definite programme of agrarian measures was envisaged, including the development of "just" leasing of land, the establishment of artels and associations, the introduction of social tillages, the encouragement of petty credit, etc. In short, the Narodniks fought for the development of petty co-operative agriculture within the framework of a communal form of landholding. They were not even opposed to maintaining commodity-money relations on condition that capitalist forms of farming were "excluded".

This programme betrayed the direct link between the Narodniks and the petty-bourgeois theory of Sismondi, the founder of petty-bourgeois romanticism in the West. In criticising Sismondi in his work *"A Characterisation of Economic Romanticism"*, Lenin with complete justification, therefore, directed his attack against the Russian Narodniks as well. By idealising petty production within the framework of continued communal landholding, the Narodniks did not want to see that "...ownership of the instruments of production by the peasantry—is historically and logically—the *starting-point* of that same *capitalist* production!"<sup>1</sup>

In spite of themselves, the Narodniks elaborated economic measures which, objectively, not only did not lead to the consolidation and extension of the commune but, on the contrary, intensified its internal disintegration and dissolution. Economic rents of any kind, credits, artels, etc., are the indispensable factors without which the development of capitalism in agriculture is inconceivable. In this way, wrote Lenin, "from the doctrine that peasant life is a special social order and that our country has taken an exceptional path of development, there has emerged a sort of diluted eclecticism, which can no longer deny that commodity economy has become the basis of economic development and has grown into capitalism, but which refuses to see the bourgeois character of all the relations of production, refuses to see the necessity of the class struggle under this system".<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to see from this how reactionary the economic platform of the liberal Narodniks of the 1890s was. They did not promote the prosperity of Russia: on the contrary, they pulled it backwards towards old, medieval economic forms.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "A Characterisation of Economic Romanticism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 210 (Note).

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 264.

However, Narodnik ideology in the political sphere was still more reactionary. This was, above all, manifested in the distorted portrayal by liberal Narodniks of the class structure of post-Reform Russia, leaving out of account new classes and their progressive role in the social development of the country. It was reflected especially in an incorrect assessment of the place and role of the industrial and rural proletariat as the most progressive, ascending class in Russia. While providing much critical data exposing capitalist exploitation, the Narodniks were nevertheless unable to go beyond such criticism and to draw the correct, scientific conclusions. They attempted to present the Russian proletariat as a declassé mass, doomed to back-breaking labour and eventual extinction. In their view this class was incapable either of creativity or of existing, growing or developing independently. The peasantry was regarded as the only class capable of leading the progressive development of the social movement in Russia.

The liberal Narodniks thus abandoned the ideas of their predecessors concerning peasant revolution and the necessity of devoted struggle for land and against the omnipotence of feudal landlords. All the designs of the "friends of the people" were now directed towards smoothing over social contradictions of every kind and resolving the urgent problems of peasant life by peaceful means through government legislation and various kinds of improved economic forms. The Narodniks focussed their attention principally on eliminating a number of evils that were preventing the development and flourishing of the commune. Among these they included usury, the land-hunger and ignorance of the peasants and the oppression of the governmental bureaucracy. They claimed that such ills of peasant life could easily be eliminated through governmental reforms without resort to extreme measures involving force or to revolution.

The reactionary character of the Narodniks was also graphically manifested in their attempt to block by all means the development of progressive social thought, the bearers of which were the first Russian Marxists. N. K. Mikhailovsky, the Narodnik ideological leader in the 1890s, who had earlier been associated with the People's Will, took upon himself a difficult and unequal task in the struggle against Marxism. He resolutely "declined" Marx's "scheme" for Russia and defended the pure, unspoiled, original path of Russian communal landholding. Mikhailovsky divided all Russian Marxists into "active" and "passive", "real" and "not real". He placed the first Russian Marxists, who supposedly

sought mechanically to transfer the Marxist scheme of historical development to Russia, among the second group.

The Narodniks made use of legal means of propaganda to launch slanderous attacks on the Marxists, accusing them of all the misfortunes of peasant life while not making the slightest allusion to the heavy burden of oppressive medieval practices that survived in the countryside. Marxist ideas concerning the great liberating mission of the working class, the only progressive class in Russia, and the only class able to lead all the oppressed masses in the struggle for political, economic and spiritual emancipation were least of all to their taste. They firmly rejected the necessity for organising the proletariat into an independent political party designed to unite all the country's progressive forces around itself and lead them in the revolutionary undertaking of smashing the obsolete foundations of social life.

"Today, the theories of these petty-bourgeois ideologists, when they come forward as the spokesmen of the interests of the working people, are positively reactionary. They obscure the antagonism of contemporary Russian social-economic relations and argue as if things could be improved by general measures, applicable to all, for 'raising', 'improving', etc., and as if it were possible to reconcile and unite. They are reactionary in depicting our state as something standing above classes and therefore fit and capable of rendering serious and honest aid to the exploited population.

"They are reactionary, lastly, because they simply cannot understand the necessity for a struggle, a desperate struggle of the working people themselves for their emancipation."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. MARXIST CRITICISM OF THE AGRARIAN THEORIES OF THE NARODNIKS AND THE "LEGAL MARXISTS"

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the founders of scientific communism, were the first to point to the erroneous nature of Narodnik views and raise the banner of struggle against this political current. The question of whether Russia could, because of the commune, make an immediate transition to socialism, bypassing the phase of capitalist development, was answered by Marx in a letter written in 1877 to Mikhailovsky: "If Russia wants to become a capitalist nation after the example of the West-European

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 286.

countries—and during the last few years she has been taking a lot of trouble in this direction—she will not succeed without having first transformed a good part of her peasants into proletarians; and then, once drawn into the whirlpool of the capitalist economy, she will have to endure its inexorable laws like other profane nations”.<sup>1</sup>

And indeed, Russia, proceeded at full speed along this path and no force could have prevented her or deflected her on to another course. Capitalism entangled the countryside in its toils, destroyed the social homogeneity of the peasantry, split the commune and intensified the proletarianisation of the rural population. Capitalism had already performed a task of great importance in turning the peasantry from loyal subjects into more conscious workers, akin in spirit and aspirations to the proletarians of the West. It was precisely this that the liberal Narodniks failed to see. They defended the old standards of life and obsolete economic forms, striving by all means to hold back economic progress.

In a letter to N. F. Danielson Engels wrote that the peasant commune contained to a certain degree some embryos which, under particular conditions, could develop and save Russia from the necessity of passing through the torment of the capitalist system. However, “the first condition necessary for this was an impulse from outside—a change in the economic system of Western Europe, destruction of the capitalist system in those countries where it had first arisen”.<sup>2</sup>

The classic authors of Marxism did not glorify capitalism. They exposed its sores ruthlessly, showing that its shackles were no less burdensome to the people than those of the feudal system. Nevertheless, they considered the capitalist system to be more progressive than feudalism, since it not only accelerated enormously the growth of the national productive forces but also created social forces capable of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and leading the peoples towards socialism.

Drawing on the example of Russia, Marx and Engels had already expressed the idea that the capitalist stage of social development could be bypassed, given two indispensable conditions: first, if popular revolution was victorious in Russia, the landlord-monarchical system abolished and private ownership of the instruments and means of production eliminated; second, if socialist revolution was victorious in the West, enabling the triumphant

<sup>1</sup> Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1975, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> Marx, Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 39, Berlin, 1968, S. 37.

proletariat of Europe to give direct international aid to the socialist development of Russia. In one of his letters to Russia Engels wrote that "if a change in the economic system in Russia coincides with a change in the economic system in the West, so that they both supplement each other, then contemporary Russian landholding (i. e. communal – S. T.) may be the starting-point for new social development"<sup>1</sup>.

The possibility of this course emerged during the 1860s-1870s, but the events of subsequent years made such a prospect recede. Indicating this, Engels wrote in 1893: "...if we had been able to overthrow the capitalist regime ten or twenty years ago, then Russia, perhaps, would have still have had time to halt the trend of its own evolution towards capitalism. Unfortunately, we are moving too slowly..."<sup>2</sup>

Russia could, therefore, have advanced along a non-capitalist path, had a socialist revolution occurred in the West during the 1860s-1870s; Engels had in view the time when the Russian land commune was still more or less whole, homogeneous and untouched by capitalism. But by the 1890s the world situation in the political respect was that "the West remained stagnant, no such transformation was attempted, and capitalism was more and more rapidly developed. And as Russia had no choice but this: either to develop the Commune ... or else to develop into Capitalism..."<sup>3</sup>

Engels's answer to the question of which direction Russia was developing quite clear-cut: Russia had entered upon the capitalist path and was inexorably destroying the old economic foundations of life.

"As to the Commune", he wrote, "it is only possible so long as the differences of wealth among its members are but trifling. As soon as these differences become great, as soon as some of its members become the debt-slaves of the richer members, it can no longer live. The кулаки and мироеды of Athens, before Solon, destroyed the Athenian gens with the same implacability with which those of your country destroy the Commune. I am afraid that institution is doomed. But on the other hand, capitalism opens out new views and new hopes".<sup>4</sup>

The struggle against the Narodniks begun by Marx and Engels was continued by the Russian Marxists – initially by the Emancipa-

<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 439.

<sup>4</sup> ibid.



tion of Labour group led by G. V. Plekhanov and later by the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class led by Lenin. Russia's first Marxists had to withstand fierce attacks from the reactionary Narodniks for their new, "European" views. Making use of legal means of printed propaganda, the latter accused the Marxists of "dogmatism" and ascribed to them the absurd theory of "agrarian nihilism", "a passive attitude towards the suffering people", etc.

N. K. Mikhailovsky, the ideological leader of liberal Narodism, wrote in the magazine *Russkoye Bogatstvo* (Russian Wealth) that the passive Marxists were not interested in the people on the land and who, in general, own the means of production, but directed their attention and hopes towards who were already alienated from the means of production. In 1894 Lenin decisively rebuffed this "critic".

However, in discussing the struggle by the Russian Marxists against Narodism, a distinction must be drawn between criticism of the latter by Plekhanov and by Lenin. Plekhanov played a very great role in the ideological routing of populism, especially in respect to his views on the commune. However, it must be noted that Plekhanov's criticism was at its weakest in the area of agrarian theory and policy. Plekhanov misunderstood the peasant question and was never a consistent Marxist in evaluating it. By regarding the peasantry as a conservative mass he drew the mistaken conclusion of disclaiming an alliance between the working class and the peasantry. This subsequently served as the basis for the Trotskyites' notion of the reactionary and bourgeois character of the entire peasantry.

Plekhanov also tolerated a one-sided approach to assessing the capitalist path of development and disproportionately glorified its progressive aspect. Such a metaphysical approach to evaluating the historical role of capitalism led him to overrate the revolutionary potential of the bourgeoisie. Plekhanov was inclined to allot the basic role in the popular revolution and in reforming the old society to the bourgeoisie. In this respect he slipped, objectively, into the position of the "legal Marxists".

The main burden of crushing Narodism was borne by Lenin, who brilliantly achieved this extremely difficult and highly important task in his classic works *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* and *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* among others. Basing himself on an enormous volume of statistical material and profound Marxist analysis, he gave a complete picture of the growth of capitalism in in-

dustry and agriculture; as it penetrates into all spheres of the country's economy, capitalism itself brings an internal market into being and creates a broad social basis for the class struggle of the industrial and agricultural proletariat.

Unlike Plekhanov, Lenin not only criticised the economic and political theory of the Narodniks but also outlined clearly for the time a practical programme in the field of agrarian reforms, a programme of action for the future Marxist party of Russia. On the basis of a large amount of factual material he showed that Marxists should not proceed from the communal system but from the irrefutable fact that capitalism had already penetrated deeply into all spheres of Russia's economic life.

Capitalism in a more developed form was dominant only in industry; in agriculture it was still at the initial stage of its development. This circumstance provided the Narodniks with grounds for asserting that the small urban and rural proletariat lacked a future. The position of the Narodniks was, however, a false one, for the question at issue here did not concern numerical balance but the existence of a new economic basis which was promoting the steady growth of the proletariat, the new, progressive class, that represented the entire working and exploited population of Russia and possessed the capacity to assume leadership of the entire liberation movement.

Lenin sharply criticised such reactionary Narodnik demands as the inalienability of peasant allotments, prohibition of withdrawal from communes, collective responsibility, etc. At the same time, Lenin, unlike Plekhanov, emphatically defended everything that promoted the development of the class struggle in the countryside and the growth of class-consciousness among the broad masses of the peasantry. Lenin spoke in favour of support for the general democratic demands of the Narodniks, but considered it necessary to strip these demands of their liberal trappings, give them a political character and turn them into a revolutionary programme for the broad masses of the peasantry.

Such Narodnik demands as ending peasant land-hunger and eliminating the burdensome taxes and oppression of the tsarist administration not only would not hold back the development of the class struggle in the countryside but would, on the contrary, clear the field of struggle with remnants of medievalism and feudalism. Lenin wrote: "There is absolutely nothing socialist in the demand for the abolition of these evils, for they do not in the least explain expropriation and exploitation, and their elimination will not in the least affect the oppression of labour by capital. But

their elimination will free this oppression of the medieval rubbish that aggravates it, and will facilitate the worker's direct struggle against capital, and for that reason as a democratic demand, will meet with the most energetic support of the workers".<sup>1</sup>

This precise statement not only outlined a clear policy of struggle against the malignant survivals of feudalism but also set forth ways of struggling against capitalism, which carries with it the heavy yoke of bourgeois exploitation. Historical conditions brought to the fore the task of uniting all the progressive social forces of Russia under the banner of Marxism and giving world-wide support to the working class, the mighty standard-bearer of the working people's great liberation struggle.

From the very outset of his political activity Lenin was obliged to wage an ideological struggle on two fronts. While decisively exposing the anti-Marxist agrarian theories of the liberal Narodniks, he also brilliantly fulfilled the historic task of revealing and crushing yet another very dangerous political current.

During the 1890s so-called legal Marxists were associated with the Russian Social-Democrats. The former decided to make their contribution to the common struggle against the Narodniks and Marxists, naturally, supported them. But it soon became clear that these "allies" were no less dangerous enemies than the liberal Narodniks. Such leading figures in this political current as Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky, Bulgakov, Berdyayev and others, who later became ordinary bourgeois liberals, were unable to conceal their true class goals. Marxism was necessary to them inasmuch as it recognised the progressive character of capitalism in comparison with feudalism and the progressive character of the European path of economic development for Russia. They were interested solely in this, purely economic, side of Marx's theory, passing over its other side—i. e. the laws of class struggle within bourgeois society—in silence or deliberately distorted the views of Marxists.

A camouflaged policy, thoroughly imbued with the bourgeois spirit, revealed itself in *Critical Notes*, the very first work by P. Struve, leader of "legal Marxism". This appeared soon after Lenin's work *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*. The opposition of the "Marxist" Struve to the Narodniks clearly proceeded from a different standpoint. Naturally, Lenin could not ignore this quasi-theoretician who, from a position of bourgeois objectivism, was seeking to pro-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats", *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 289.

vide a basis for the social and economic development of Russia. He considered it necessary not only to demarcate himself from such an "ally" immediately, but also to subject him to strong criticism.

In his article "The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of It in Mr Struve's Book", Lenin stripped "legal Marxism" of its camouflage and showed its true, bourgeois nature. Describing these ideologists as bourgeois fellow-travellers of Russian Social-Democracy, Lenin showed that they completely ignored social contradictions in the bourgeois society then developing and cast a veil over class antagonisms in the Russian countryside. Lenin charged Struve with failing to go beyond criticism of the economic aspect of Narodnik views, halting precisely where he should have moved on to expose the class contradictions within the bourgeois society of Russia and launch a critique of the anti-Marxist views of Narodism.

In criticising the Narodnik theory concerning the historical role played by the radical intelligentsia in the social movement of Russia, Struve failed to show the former's petty-bourgeois character and its direct ideological link with the rural peasant bourgeoisie. Later, while stressing the advantages of "bourgeois progress" for the countryside, Struve ignored the disintegration of the peasantry into separate classes whose interests were affected in quite different ways by "bourgeois progress".

While idealising the future of capitalist relations in the countryside, he was completely silent concerning the cruel class antagonisms that had already arisen as a result of these relations. In contrast to the bourgeois-objectivist views of Struve and his followers, Lenin's writings showed the historically transitory character of capitalism, which had already created conditions in Russia that made it necessary to arouse and unite all the proletarian forces of town and country for class struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Having launched a front of struggle against liberal Narodism and "legal Marxism", Lenin was obliged by the situation that had emerged to assume the heavy burden of struggle against West-European revisionism as well. The latter began its crusade against Marxism in the latter part of the 1890s. By this time a revisionist group headed by Bernstein had already formed in German Social-Democracy and launched an all-embracing struggle for a revision of the theory of Marxism. The first revisionists in connection with the agrarian question were Vollmar, David, Hertz who attempted to prove that the Marxist laws of the development of large-

scale capitalist production were not applicable to agriculture. Petty peasant farming, they claimed, was not supplanted by large-scale enterprises: on the contrary, because of its stability it had every advantage over large-scale farming.

These revisionist ideas found a vigorous response both among the "legal Marxists", who had abandoned their Marxist guise, and the Narodniks, especially the Socialist-Revolutionary party which was later formed. Ideological struggle in the agrarian area was therefore extremely intense and hard-fought, going beyond the bounds of Russia to assume an international character. In a number of works, including *Capitalism in Agriculture*, "Review of Karl Kautsky's *Die Agrarfrage*" and others, Lenin opposed the defenders of small production in agriculture as ideologists of the petty bourgeoisie.

Lenin demonstrated irrefutably that the laws of capitalist development discovered by Marx operate in agriculture as well as in industry, although they take a distinctive form in the former. He showed that the anti-scientific theories of Western revisionists, which were to the taste of the liberal Narodniks and "legal Marxists", reflected the interests of the peasant bourgeoisie, to which the latter looked for support in the struggle against the imminent threat from the class which was capable of smashing the forces of capital—the revolutionary proletariat.

## CHAPTER III

# THEORETICAL ELABORATION OF THE FIRST MARXIST AGRARIAN PROGRAMME AND ITS ADOPTION AT THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE RSDLP

## I. LENINIST SUBSTANTIATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RSDLP TOWARDS THE PEASANTRY

Proceeding from his economic analysis of agrarian relations in post-Reform Russia, Lenin did not leave his task unfinished. Instead, he proceeded to *undertake a theoretical substantiation of the proletariat's revolutionary strategy and tactics towards the peasantry and subsequently to elaboration of the first Marxist agrarian programme of Russian Social-Democracy*. The complexity of the agrarian question, the result of the distinctive and diverse character of land and social relations, demanded a profoundly scientific and revolutionary approach to its solution.

Lenin never viewed the agrarian question in isolation from the liberation struggle of the proletariat. This brilliant feature distinguished him from those theoreticians who wrote mountains of books on the agrarian question, but studied this subject only for the sake of scholarship, without advancing it one iota in the interests of the toiling peasantry. *Lenin tirelessly drew answers to the pressing problems of life from his research. The conclusions yielded by scholarship were immediately applied to invigorating revolutionary practice.*

*The Marxist idea of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry lay at the basis of Lenin's revolutionary tactics. Lenin armed the proletarian party with this idea and tirelessly propagated and developed it from the very beginning of his political activity. Although the Russia of that time had not yet witnessed joint revolutionary actions undertaken by the working class and the peasantry, this enormous force had more than once shaken the dominant exploiting classes in the West. (In elaborating the revolutionary tactics of the Russian Marxists, Lenin relied not only on scientific analysis of the social and economic conditions of Russia*

but also on the experience of revolutionary struggle gained by the working class and peasantry in the capitalist countries of Europe.

Lenin's principal guide in this was formed by the brilliant pronouncements of Marx and Engels concerning an alliance between the working class and the peasantry. As early as 1847 Engels wrote that the only prospect available to the petty bourgeoisie was "to muster behind the long files of the proletariat and to march under its banner".<sup>1</sup> In another article Engels predicted that "a time will come when the fleeced and impoverished section of the peasantry will unite with the proletariat, which by then will be further developed, and will declare war on the bourgeoisie".<sup>2</sup>

The idea of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry was formulated with especial clarity in Marxist writings devoted to the bourgeois revolutions of the mid-19th century. In "*The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*" Marx stressed that the revolutions that had swept through the countries of Western Europe had raised the mass of peasants and the petty-bourgeoisie against the domination of capital, compelling them "to attach themselves to the proletarians as their protagonists"<sup>3</sup>; "the sections of the petty bourgeoisie and peasant class already revolutionised had naturally to ally themselves with the high dignity of revolutionary interests, the revolutionary proletariat".<sup>4</sup>

These thoughts penetrate the entire fabric of many works by Marx and Engels. It is sufficient to name such works as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *The Peasant War in Germany*, *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, *Address by the Central Authority to the League*, March 1850, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and others, in which the idea of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry was fully delineated.

In *The Class Struggles in France* Marx wrote that "only the fall of capital can raise the peasant; only an anti-capitalist, a proletarian government can break his economic misery, his social degradation".<sup>5</sup> He stressed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that the peasants "find their natural ally and leader in the urban proletariat, whose task is the overthrow of the bourgeois order".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Engels, "The Constitutional Question in Germany", in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Moscow, 1976, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels, "The Movements of 1847", *Collected Works*, *ibid.*, p. 525.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, Moscow, 1978, p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 11, p. 191.

In elaborating the idea of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, the leaders of the proletariat pointed to the necessity for close joint actions by these socially oppressed classes in the revolutionary struggle for liberation and to the necessity for combining the proletarian revolution with the peasant revolutionary movement. In a letter to Engels written in 1856 Marx noted: "The whole thing in Germany will depend on the possibility of backing the proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasant War."<sup>1</sup> He pointed out that the peasant "will part with his belief in his smallholding, the entire state edifice erected on this smallholding will fall to the ground and *the proletarian revolution will obtain that chorus without which its solo becomes a swan song in all peasant countries*".<sup>2</sup>

(The idea of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry occupied a prominent place in the theoretical works of Marx and Engels and was the object of close attention throughout the entire course of their political activity. *Lenin was the first Russian Marxist to raise aloft the brilliant ideas of the founders of scientific communism on an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, which became one of the keystones of Leninism.*)

Like Marx and Engels, he directed his attention from the very outset of his political activity towards eliciting the potential capacities of the Russian peasantry's revolutionary forces as the main ally of the proletariat in the oncoming people's revolution. The incorrect statements of some historians, who have written that Lenin embarked upon the elaboration of this problem only during the years of the first Russian revolution, must be decisively rejected. Such statements indicate a failure to understand the principal content of Lenin's first works, at the core of which lay the Marxist ideas of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry. Lenin's merit was to develop these ideas further, creatively embodying them in the practical revolutionary struggle waged by Russian Social-Democracy.

First and foremost, it should be pointed out that Lenin was responsible for comprehensive substantiation of the historic role of the Russian proletariat not only in Russia's liberation struggle but also in the entire international workers' movement. Lenin's prophetic words in his classic work *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* still ring out with unexam-

<sup>1</sup> Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, p. 193, Note 6.



pled power: "Accordingly, it is on the working class that the Social-Democrats concentrate all their attention and all their activities. When its advanced representatives have mastered the ideas of scientific socialism, the idea of the historical role of the Russian worker, when these ideas become widespread, and when stable organisations are formed among the workers to transform the workers' present sporadic economic war into conscious class struggle—then the Russian **WORKER**, rising at the head of all the democratic elements, will overthrow absolutism and lead the **RUSSIAN PROLETARIAT** (side by side with the proletariat of **ALL COUNTRIES**) *along the straight road of open political struggle to the VICTORIOUS COMMUNIST REVOLUTION.*"<sup>1</sup>

Lenin showed the falsity and groundlessness of retrograde assertions by the Narodniks that, because of its small size, the Russian proletariat was without a future. The role of the Russian proletariat could not be defined only on the basis of a numerical comparison between it and the enormous mass of peasants. The strength of the Russian proletariat in the movement of history was immeasurably greater than its share of the country's total population.

The Russian proletariat's numbers did not correspond to the calculations of the Narodniks. The *urban proletariat* then constituted only 1.4 million—a small part of Russia's population. However, if the *rural proletariat*, representing 40 per cent of the rural population, was added to the urban proletariat, we find that at that time there were already 7.5 million male workers, constituting approximately half the entire adult male population engaged in the production of material values.

It was from this social and economic basis that Lenin proceeded in substantiating the vanguard role of the Russian proletariat. This new, ascendent class was the natural representative of the entire toiling, exploited population of Russia. This class could and had to assume leadership of the entire Russian liberation movement. Lenin profoundly and comprehensively substantiated the principle that an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry was based on their fundamental class interests and their common goals and objectives in the liberation struggle. The alliance of these two friendly classes was vital both in order to destroy the old world and annihilate bourgeois-landlord dominance and to create a new social system in the world more humane and progressive than any other. Both classes—the proletariat and the peasantry—were equally inter-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats", Vol. 1, p. 300.

*ested in the functioning of this alliance.* A one-sided approach was therefore inadmissible in examining this subject.

The history of the liberation movement showed that without an alliance with the peasantry the proletariat could not fulfil its mission of liberation, just as the peasantry, by its own unaided efforts, could not liberate itself from landlord and capitalist enslavement. The point at issue consisted entirely in deciding which class should play the leading, guiding role in this alliance. Here Lenin depended on the facts of history, knowledge of life and rich experience of liberation struggle. The latter showed that only the working class, which had passed through the school of factory training and class struggle, could become such a leading force. The role of the most organised and steadfast fighter for the interests of the entire toiling and exploited masses belonged to the working class.

In the struggle against Narodism Marxists were obliged to devote considerable effort to demonstrating that, despite its greater size, the Russian peasantry could not assume leadership of the liberation struggle because of its lack of social and economic unity and its political immaturity. Moreover, although the peasantry had struggled for centuries to liberate itself from age-old slavery, it had never achieved victory over its class enemies. Those victories that had been gained in the early anti-feudal revolutions in the West had been appropriated by the bourgeoisie.

The peasantry, being an active revolutionary force, acted in these revolutions *not as an independent force*, but under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. In such alliances the peasantry was always duped by its ally after victory over the nobility and landlords to find itself subject to a new, still more cruel bondage. The facts indicated that the working class, which derived absolutely no benefit from the disastrous position of the peasantry, was the only possible disinterested ally and the most faithful leader of the peasantry. It was clear, too, that the fruits of victory by this alliance of working people over their common enemies—the landlords and the capitalists—would go not to one of the victors but to the proletariat and the peasantry together.)

A further great merit of Lenin's was to have been the first Marxist to substantiate ways and means of strengthening and expanding the alliance between the working class and the peasantry and to point out that the *decisive, vital force in this alliance was the Marxist workers' party.*

Lenin was well aware of the complexity of inter-class links in the countryside and the consequent complexity of the tasks facing

Russian Social-Democracy. In analysing the *role of the peasantry in the coming revolution*, he produced a searching characterisation of its individual strata, showing, on the one hand, the inter-relations within the peasantry itself, which was disintegrating into different groups, and, on the other, the relationship of the entire peasantry to other struggling classes. "...In the modern Russian village two kinds of class antagonism exist side by side: first, the antagonism between the agricultural workers and the proprietors, and, secondly, the antagonism between the peasantry as a whole and the landlord class as a whole. The first antagonism is developing and becoming more acute; the second is gradually diminishing. The first is still wholly in the future, the second to a considerable degree already belongs to the past. And yet, despite this, it is the second antagonism that has the most vital and most practical significance for Russian Social-Democrats at the present time."<sup>1</sup>

During the revolutionary lull of the 1890s Lenin substantiated the important principle that the class struggle had to be introduced into the countryside as the main condition for ensuring the elevation of the peasant masses to an understanding of general class political goals. He considered it a matter of urgency for Russian Social-Democracy to put forward practical agrarian demands that were comprehensible to the broad peasant masses.

An outstanding role in disseminating revolutionary ideas among the peasants was played by Lenin's newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark). Russian Social-Democracy made extensive use in its workers' newspaper of every act of tyranny by the landlords and the police, every step taken against the peasants by the government, to influence the peasant masses and explain to them the anti-popular nature of the landlord-monarchical regime. It was the duty of Social-Democrats constantly to indicate that all the misfortunes of the peasants sprang from class oppression of them, Lenin stated. "The most common facts in the life of any Russian village provide a thousand issues for agitation on behalf of the above demands. This agitation must be based upon the local, concrete, and most pressing needs of the peasantry; yet it must not be confined to these needs, but must be steadily directed towards widening the outlook of the peasants, towards developing their political consciousness."<sup>2</sup> The task of introducing the class struggle to the countryside and spreading it there accordingly occupied a para-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Workers' Party and the Peasantry", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, Moscow, 1971, p. 423.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 425.

mount place in the tactics of the Marxists. "Social-Democracy would not be doing its duty if it did not render every assistance to this struggle. This assistance should take the form, briefly put, of carrying the class struggle into the countryside."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Lenin, entering upon the field of revolutionary struggle, correctly indicated as early as the 1890s that the decisive condition for gaining and consolidating revolutionary power by the proletariat was an alliance between the working class and the toiling masses of the peasantry, the leading role in which would be played by the working class headed by its vanguard—a revolutionary Marxist party. Only by relying on this alliance and organising and unifying the basic masses of the peasantry around itself could the working class accomplish its historic mission of liberating not only itself, the class of workers, but also the toiling peasantry and all mankind from the oppression of capital.

This Marxist-Leninist principle has now been verified by the entire historical development of the international workers' movement and confirmed by revolutionary practice in the Soviet Union and the fresh experience of great social reforms in other socialist countries advancing under the all-conquering banner of Marxism-Leninism.

## 2. THE PROGRAMME DEMANDS OF THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE RSDLP IN THE AREA OF AGRARIAN REFORMS

The first attempt to formulate a Marxist agrarian programme for Russia was made by the Emancipation of Labour group, but it failed to accomplish its task, for the members of the first Marxist group themselves did not have correct Marxist views on the subject. While pronouncing themselves in favour of the necessity for an agrarian programme in principle, they simultaneously stated that, since Russia as yet lacked a Marxist party, there was no need to draw up such a programme. Instead, it would be better merely to outline the general guidelines of an agrarian programme. Unfortunately, the Emancipation of Labour group was unable to give even these guidelines.

In both the first and the second programmes of the group, agrarian demands were confined only to general principles of

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 423.

a declaratory nature. Both programmes stated that the workers' party would strive to achieve "a radical review of our agrarian relations, i.e. the conditions of the redemption of land and its allotment to peasant communes. The right to reject allotments and leave the commune will be made available to those peasants who find this in their interests etc."<sup>1</sup> No concrete demands of any kind concerning the review of agrarian relations in Russia were set forth: Plekhanov himself later said in connection with these programmes that the most immediate economic demands of the Social-Democrats had a very strange property: "...they are both definite and vague at the same time."<sup>2</sup>

However, the agrarian question was becoming increasingly acute. Circumstances urgently demanded a correct answer to this burning question from Russian Social-Democracy. Moreover, the acuteness of the problem was intensified still further, firstly, by the fact that the Narodnik ideologists made use of the agrarian question as the main weapon in their struggle against Marxism and, secondly, by the position of the peasantry, which was worsening catastrophically from year to year. Under such circumstances the treachery of the Narodniks had to be revealed to the working people.

*The historic task of providing wise and far-sighted answers to the questions advanced by reality fell to Lenin. Lenin embodied the aspirations and hopes of Russia's many millions of peasants, who had groaned for long centuries under the burden of oppression by feudal landowners. In his early works Lenin not only provided a theoretical grounding for the agrarian question but also elaborated a practical programme of agrarian demands corresponding to the interests of the peasants' liberation struggle.*

*In the first outline of a draft programme, written by Lenin in December 1895, we can already see elements of the agrarian demands made by the future Russian Social-Democratic Party. These demands stimulated the peasantry to broaden the class struggle in the countryside and helped to awaken the peasants from their age-old slumber. The draft stated that the primary objectives for the peasants demanded by the Russian Social-Democratic Party were:*

1 Abolition of land redemption payments and compensation to the peasants for redemption payments made. Return to the peasants of excess payments made to the Treasury.

<sup>1</sup> G. V. Plekhanov, *Works*, Vol. II, Moscow-Petrograd, 1923, p. 361 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 412.

› Return to the peasants of their lands cut off in 1861.  
Complete equality of taxation of the peasants' and landlords'  
land.

4. Abolition of collective responsibility and of all laws that prevent The peasants from doing as they will with their lands".<sup>1</sup>

As he worked on the draft of the first Marxist agrarian programme Lenin clarified its theoretical and political wording point by point, broadening peasant demands in order "to guide the activities of those forces that *cannot* find an outlet anywhere except in the rural localities and to utilise for the cause of democracy, for the political struggle for freedom, the ties which, owing to the force of circumstances, a good many faithful Social-Democratic intellectuals and workers have with the countryside—ties that are necessarily increasing and growing stronger with the growth of the movement".<sup>2</sup>

This far-sighted objective powerfully manifests Lenin's wisdom and insight. As subsequent events in Russia showed, these ties between Social-Democracy and the peasantry broadened and strengthened year by year. Revolutionary ideas penetrated the countryside through many visible and invisible channels. Workers who had not yet broken their ties with the land returned to the village from time to time, bringing with them the ideas and habits of the class struggle in which they were participants in the industrial centres; capitalism itself, in dividing the peasantry into proletariat and bourgeoisie, created extensive opportunities for advanced workers and members of the intelligentsia to exercise a revolutionary influence on the countryside; finally, the introduction of revolutionary ideas into the countryside was facilitated by the tsarist government itself through the mass exiling to their home districts of workers who had taken an active part in strikes or in making revolutionary propaganda.

Lenin continued to elaborate and refine the issues dealt with by the agrarian programme in the pages of *Iskra*, supplementing the programme with new demands arising from concrete conditions. In the programme article "The Workers' Party and the Peasantry", published in issue No. 3 of *Iskra*, he formulated a number of new agrarian principles. (Since the Russian peasantry had yet to rise to an understanding of its general class goals.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Workers' Party and the Peasantry", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 427.

Lenin proposed the immediate practical needs of the peasants as a starting point, since these were more accessible and comprehensible to them.

In setting forth these objectives he substantially broadened earlier agrarian demands, supplementing them with new ones, including the establishment of peasants' committees to correct the blatant injustices which the committees of the nobility, enjoying the protection of the government, continued to create and the establishment of truly democratic courts, which would have the right to reduce the exorbitantly high payments for land levied by landlords as well as to terminate one-sided deals imposed by usurers. "We must definitely include in our programme demands for the emancipation of our countryside from all the survivals of slavery, demands capable of rousing the best section of the peasantry, if not to engage in independent political action, then at all events consciously to support the working-class struggle for emancipation".<sup>1</sup>

In the course of this programme article Lenin revealed with unimpeachable logic the directions followed by the developing class struggle in the countryside. The main objective was to liberate the countryside from major survivals of the Middle Ages and to clear the way for free development of the productive forces in agriculture, in which the entire peasantry was interested. The peasantry, therefore, had to act as a united force in the struggle against the autocracy and the landlords and Social-Democrats were bound to help the peasantry unite itself for this struggle.

At the same time, Lenin pointed out that the peasantry could act as a united class for only so long as the struggle was aimed at destroying the dominance of the landlords. Only the poor peasants, who were closely united around the working class, could proceed beyond this point; however, the gains to be made in the latter case would be not only democratic but also socialist. "The small peasantry can free itself from the yoke of capital only by associating itself with the working-class movement, by helping the workers in their struggle for the socialist system, for transforming the land, as well as the other means of production (factories, works, machines, etc.) into social property".<sup>2</sup>

Proceeding from this, Lenin had already set the goal of struggle against petty-bourgeois illusions of "the drive towards equality" and "prosperity" under capitalism. "Trying to save the peasantry by protecting small-scale farming and smallholdings from the on-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 426.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 422.

slaught of capitalism would be a useless retarding of social development; it would mean deceiving the peasantry with illusions of the possibility of prosperity even under capitalism, it would mean disuniting the labouring classes and creating a privileged position for the minority at the expense of the majority."<sup>1</sup>

The standpoint of Russian Marxists on agrarian issues had thus been quite thoroughly illuminated by the time the Second Congress of the RSDLP was convened. The pungent discussion that took place on the editorial board of *Iskra* concluded with the preparation of a draft of the first Marxist agrarian programme. Serious differences arose between Lenin and the other editors of *Iskra* in elaborating the draft programme. The Menshevik leaders were already displaying an inclination towards opportunism and took a negative attitude towards radical measures to solve the agrarian question. They showed signs of a dogmatic approach to Marxism, having lost their ability to apply Marxism creatively to Russian conditions.

Plekhanov and those who shared his views fiercely opposed Lenin's proposal to include the nationalisation of all land in the programme of demands. The majority of *Iskra*'s editors opposed nationalisation in the most forceful terms during discussion of this issue. A text prepared by Plekhanov in response to Lenin's proposal stated: "Nationalisation of land as a demand not directly preceding socialisation of all means of production cannot be recognised by Social-Democracy and all pages relating to this are therefore to be discarded and the characterisation of this measure as reactionary at the present moment and superfluous as an isolated part of the ultimate socialist objective is to be retained and reinforced".<sup>2</sup> In discussing Lenin's draft programme Axelrod went so far as to declare that "nationalisation of the land, even as a slogan for an uprising, is now anti-revolutionary".<sup>3</sup> It is understandable that, since this view on the nationalisation of land was held by the majority of editors, Lenin decided not to mention land nationalisation at all.

A similar situation was observed in connection with the demand for the expropriation of all landlords' land. Although this subject did not arouse such a sharp response as nationalisation, Plekhanov's point of view on it had been known even earlier. He was a firm opponent of "fragmenting" large farms of any kind, includ-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 422-23.

<sup>2</sup> See *Leninsky sbornik* (Lenin Miscellany) III, pp. 362-363.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, see p. 385.



ing those owned by landlords. At this time he inclined towards a reformist solution of this issue, involving the reimbursement in one form or another of large land proprietors for land lost by them.

On the editorial board of *Iskra* Lenin objected strongly to the reference to redemption that had been left in the programme. He stated: "(1) In the agrarian programme we present our 'maximum', our 'socio-revolutionary demands'... Allowing land redemption, however, runs counter to the socio-revolutionary nature of the entire demand.

(2) Both the historical tradition of 'redemption' (that of 1861) and its very content ... give it the specific flavour of a mawkishly well-intentioned and bourgeois measure. Our allowing land redemption makes it not impossible for the entire essence of our demand to be discredited (and there will be more than enough vili-fiers prepared to do this)." <sup>1</sup> Lenin's amendment was rejected by the majority of members of the editorial board.

Lenin resolutely opposed redemption or re-imbursement at all stages of the revolution, since the peasants had not only been robbed by the Reform but had also long since paid in full for the land they received. To support yet another new redemption would mean consenting to blatant injustice in relation to the peasantry; it would mean coming to the defence of the landlords and assigning partial responsibility for their plundering to the destitute peasant village itself. Therefore Lenin could not agree with this point in the programme, which was pushed through by the Men-shevik editors of *Iskra*.

Plekhanov's standpoint in assessing the peasantry as an ally of the proletariat was also non-Marxist. On this issue he was at one with F. Lassalle and the theoreticians of Western Social-Democracy, who viewed the entire peasantry as an anti-revolutionary class, unable to rally to the socialist colours of the working class. Plekhanov considered that the peasantry could associate itself with the socialist revolution only after it had been expropriated by capitalism and turned into an agricultural proletariat.

Despite these profound differences, the draft agrarian programme presented by *Iskra* was unanimously defended at the congress by all members of the editorial board. The struggle that revolved around the agrarian programme at the congress was extremely fierce. The opportunist Makhov, for example, abruptly

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "An Amendment to the Agrarian Section of the Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Moscow, 1964, p. 77.

rejected the agrarian programme, declaring that "the presentation of a common programme inevitably leads to the programme becoming demagogic on the whole and an adventure when put into effect."<sup>1</sup> Although no more such speeches were heard at the congress, ferocious attacks were nevertheless mounted on the programme by opportunists.

The menshevik P. Maslov advanced his notorious plan for the municipalisation of land, proposing "...the transfer of part of the private land (big estates), and of all the land, if possible, to large self-governing public organisations (the Zemstvos)".<sup>2</sup> N. Ryazanov, another apologist for Menshevism, put forward a proposal for the expropriation of all large estates, including both landlords and well-to-do peasants. Ryazanov considered this the minimum demand of a revolutionary party. Expropriated lands were to be made state property, with the object of leasing them to all peasants.

The struggle over two demands in the programme—those concerning the cut-off lands and peasant committees—was particularly fierce. Various points of view were expressed on the subject of the cut-off lands: *some* considered the programme's demand inadequate, *others* cast doubt upon it generally under the pretext that there was no need to correct an historical injustice while a third group of speakers stated that the demand for the cut-off lands was incorrect in principle, since this would weaken large-scale capitalist farming and strengthen petty land ownership—which was contrary to Marxism.

Lenin and the other members of the *Iskra* editorial board answered all these objections brilliantly. In examining the question of small property, Lenin stated that this could not, indeed, be supported if it was counterposed to large-scale capitalist farming. "In this case, however, we want to support small property not against capitalism but against serf-ownership; in this case, by supporting the small peasantry, we give a powerful impulse to the development of the class struggle. Indeed, on the one hand, we are thus making a last attempt to fan the embers of the peasants' class (social-estate) enmity for the feudal-minded landlords. On the other hand, we are clearing the way for the development of the bourgeois class antagonism in the countryside, because that an-

<sup>1</sup> *The Second Congress of the RSDLP, Minutes*, Moscow, 1959, p. 221 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of Agrarian Programme of Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, Moscow, 1978, p. 172.

tagonism is at present *masked* by what is supposedly the common and equal oppression of all the peasants by the remnants of the serf-owning system.”<sup>1</sup> Lenin went on to point out that “the contradictory position of the small peasant on the boundary between serf economy and capitalist economy fully justifies this exceptional and temporary support of small property by the Social-Democrats. ...This is not a contradiction in the wording or in the formulation of our programme, but a contradiction in real life”.<sup>2</sup>

In response to arguments that the demand for the cut-off lands was inadequate, it was stated that this demand was not to be understood to mean that Social-Democracy would withhold its support from the peasants if they encroached upon all lands owned by the landlords. An excellent commentary on this question was given by G. V. Plekhanov: “We are told that, in presenting a demand for the return of the cut-off lands, we should remember that the peasants will go beyond this demand. This does not frighten us in the least... If the peasantry were to follow this course in the struggle against survivals of feudal relations, then we would not hold back this progressive movement. Our role would only consist, in contrast to our opponents, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, who see this as the beginning of socialisation, in directing all our efforts to ensuring that the proletariat be left with no illusions concerning the outcome of this movement and to exposing its bourgeois character”.<sup>3</sup>

Plekhanov went on to explain that the demand for the return of the cut-off lands was the first step towards future expropriation of large estates. “The demand to which we incline at the present moment depends on the balance of social forces and on this alone. Now, when the revolutionary energy of the peasantry is *very slight*, we are naturally indicating for it a more modest demand, but if the time should come when our peasantry reveals very great revolutionary energy, we, of course, shall not drag it back. That is certainly not our business. We shall indicate to it a broader revolutionary goal.”<sup>4</sup>

The standpoints of Lenin and Plekhanov thus coincided completely on the subject of the cut-off lands. The same was true of *pea-*

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> *The Second Congress of the RSDLP, Minutes*, p. 223 (in Russian).

<sup>4</sup> G. V. Plekhanov, *Works*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1925, Vol. 12, p. 409 (in Russian).

ant committees, in defending the expediency of which *they were at one*. Martov also spoke in favour of the committees. "It is difficult to predict now how revolutionary the peasant committees will be," he said. "But we must apply all our efforts to ensuring that they are revolutionary. We must introduce the class struggle into the countryside and organise the rural proletariat—then the influence of Social-Democrats will undoubtedly be reflected in the peasant committees".<sup>1</sup>

Of course, this did not reduce the importance of the differences which had been expressed on the editorial board of *Iskra* during elaboration of the first agrarian programme. It should be stressed that the failure of Plekhanov and others to understand Marxist agrarian theory, which emerged during elaboration of the first programme, made itself felt during the subsequent stage of the struggle, as will be shown below.

Active support for the first agrarian programme came from *Iskra* agents, many of whom were delegates to the congress. The delegate S. I. Gusev, for example, stated in rejecting the pessimism of the opportunists: "It may be boldly said that our motto is very broad—and not a single political party in Europe has yet proposed to the peasantry so extensive a programme at a stroke."<sup>2</sup> It was most important that a political force in the form of the Marxist party which had emerged in Russia had taken the solution of the acute social problem that the agrarian and peasant problem was into its own hands, the *Iskra* agents stressed. Adoption of the first agrarian programme of the RSDLP therefore became an outstanding landmark in the history of the emancipation struggle of the toiling peasantry of Russia.

The agrarian programme was adopted by the Second congress without substantial alterations as a result of the unity of action displayed by the editorial staff of *Iskra* and its Marxist agents. Two main aims were formulated in the agrarian part of the Programme: elimination of feudal survivals and promotion of the class struggle in the countryside. The Party, proceeding from these aims, put forward five fundamental peasant demands:

(1) abolition of land redemption and quit-rent payments, as well as of all services now imposed on the peasantry as a taxable social-estate;

annulment of collective liability and of all laws restricting the peasant in the free disposal of his land;

<sup>1</sup> *The Second Congress of the RSDLP, Minutes*, p. 246, (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 221-22.

(3) restitution to the people of all sums taken from them in the form of land redemption and quit-rent payments; confiscation for this purpose of monasterial property and of the royal demesnes, and imposition of a special land tax on members of the big landed nobility who received land redemption loans, the revenue thus obtained to be credited to a special public fund for the cultural and charitable needs of the village communes;

(4) establishment of peasant committees

(a) for the restitution to the village communes (by expropriation, or, when the land has changed hands, by redemption, etc.) of the land cut off from the peasants when serfdom was abolished and now used by the landlords as a means of keeping the peasants in bondage;

(b) for the eradication of the remnants of the serf-owning system which still exist in the Urals, the Altai, the Western territory, and other regions of the country;

(5) empowerment of courts to reduce exorbitant rents and to declare null and void all contracts entailing bondage."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. LENIN'S ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST AGRARIAN PROGRAMME

Did the programme embrace all aspects of the agrarian problem? Was it too moderate for a revolutionary Marxist party?

Unfortunately, the first agrarian programme was far from all-embracing, either in the theoretical or the practical sense. It was clearly inadequate, as Lenin indicated more than once.

The same was true of its well-known moderation: the programme lacked one of the main agrarian demands—confiscation of all landlords' estates—, contained no reference to land nationalisation and, finally, bypassed the important issue of organising the rural proletariat into an independent class force. Yet all these problems were theoretically substantiated in Lenin's early works. The agrarian programme elaborated in these works was more radical than that which was adopted at the Second congress of the RSDLP.

Why? Before answering this question, we shall dwell briefly on Lenin's work *Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy*, in which he provided a commentary upon the RSDLP's first agrarian programme. Lenin noted that, because of special histori-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 112.

cal circumstances, the agrarian programme provided for "minimum" and "maximum" peasant demands and was, correspondingly, divided into two sections—a workers' section and a peasants' section. "...In the workers' section we have no right to go beyond the bounds of demands for social reform; in the peasants' section, however, we must not stop at social-revolutionary demands. In other words: in the workers' section we are definitely limited by the minimum programme; in the peasants' section we can and must produce a maximum programme."<sup>1</sup>

These observations reveal in all their depth the subtlety of Lenin's ideas, which were embodied in the first agrarian programme. We see here a precise demarcation of the class interests of the peasantry and of the proletariat at different stages of the liberation struggle. The workers' section of the agrarian programme set forth the goal of creating conditions for free development of the class struggle in the countryside. It was intended exclusively for the agricultural proletariat, who were capable under certain conditions of acting with the urban proletariat in the struggle against the urban and rural bourgeoisie.

The peasants' section of the programme established the aim of destroying remnants of feudalism in the countryside. It was intended for the peasantry as a whole. "As opposed to serf-ownership, to the feudal-minded landlords, and the state that serves them, the peasantry still stands as a *class*, a class not of capitalist but of serf-owning society, i. e. as an estate-class. Inasmuch as this class antagonism between 'the peasantry' and the privileged landowners, so characteristic of serf-owning society, still survives in our countryside, *insomuch* a working-class party must undoubtedly be on the side of the 'peasantry', support its struggle...."<sup>2</sup>

No serious differences arose in connection with the motivating section of the programme concerning the necessity for a division of objectives—destruction of feudal survivals, on the one hand, and promotion of the class struggle in the countryside, on the other. The difficulty consisted entirely in giving concrete expression to the peasants' part of the programme: in establishing the maximum Social-Democracy could promise the peasantry as a whole without damaging the interests of extending the class struggle in the countryside.

Lenin never regarded the demand for return of the cut-off lands as representing a maximum. In his work *What the "Friends of the*

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, 117-18.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 118.

*People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* and later, in discussions of the draft agrarian programme on the editorial board of *Iskra*, he declared frankly that the Marxist maximum programme concerning the agrarian question was nationalisation of the land. However, under the concrete historical conditions of the time, the best means of raising the peasantry to political struggle was the demand for the return of cut-off lands. This "is the maximum that we can at present advance in our agrarian programme,"<sup>1</sup> Lenin stated.

In elaborating this idea, Lenin indicated that the demand for land nationalisation "(if it is interpreted in the bourgeois sense, and not in the socialist) does actually 'go further' than the demand for the restitution of the cut-off lands, and in principle we fully endorse it. It goes without saying that, when the revolutionary moment comes, we shall not fail to advance it. But our present programme is being drawn up, not only for the period of revolutionary insurrection, not even so much for that period, as for the period of political slavery, for the period that precedes political liberty. However, in this period the demand for the nationalisation of the land is *much less* expressive of the immediate tasks of the democratic movement in the meaning of a struggle against the serf-owning system. The demand for the establishment of peasant committees and for the restitution of the cut-off lands kindles this class struggle in the countryside directly..."<sup>2</sup>

Why did Lenin not include in the first programme all those radical agrarian demands that had been substantiated in his early works, in particular in *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats and The Development of Capitalism in Russia*? There were three main reasons for this. [Firstly] it must be remembered that Lenin's theoretical elaboration of the agrarian and peasant question was conducted amid acute ideological struggle with the liberal Narodniks who were seeking to counterpose to Marxism their petty-bourgeois prejudices concerning a non-capitalist path of development for Russia, the triumph of communal landholding and the historic mission of the peasantry as the main force in the country's social development. The main task of the Social-Democrats was, therefore, to smash these reactionary views, fix the attention of the progressive forces of Russia on the proletariat and promote the raising of this

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 118 (Note).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

*new, growing class to an understanding of its great vanguard role in carrying out fundamental revolutionary reforms.*

To this end every effort had to be made above all to unite the industrial and rural proletariat and bring it to the fore in society. In this connection *particular attention had to be directed towards the agricultural proletariat with the object of singling it out from the entire mass of the peasantry and arousing in it class consciousness and an understanding of the urgent necessity for achieving unity around the industrial proletariat.* Lenin invariably stressed that this aim was for the time central to the activities of Social-Democracy. Therefore, any attempts to bring the entire peasantry to the fore as a single undivided mass could damage this principal goal.

Proceeding specifically from the class principle of demarcating proletarian elements from the peasantry as a whole, Lenin gave greatest prominence to the demand for return of the cut-off lands. He considered that this demand should form the means that would best promote the growth of the class struggle in the countryside and the formation of socialist consciousness among the agricultural proletariat. "We ... would be abandoning the class standpoint of the proletariat, if we allowed our programme to state that the 'peasantry' (i.e. the rich plus the poor) will go together beyond eradication of the remnants of serfdom; we would thereby be putting a brake on this absolutely essential, and, from the standpoint of the Social-Democrat, the most important, process of the final separation of the rural proletariat from the land-holding peasantry, the process of the development of proletarian class-consciousness in the countryside."<sup>1</sup>

This is why Lenin considered advancement of the demand for expropriation of all landlords' estates to be premature, since it could retard development of class-consciousness among the proletarianised peasants and inspire them with the hope of becoming petty landed proprietors, thereby sharing in essence the then dominant petty-bourgeois views of the Narodniks. It is necessary only to imbue oneself with Lenin's thinking in order to understand its great revolutionary dialectic in solving the agrarian and peasant question.

The demand for the return of the cut-off lands by no means represented a maximum. It formed a kind of reconnaissance in depth, designed to feel out the extent to which the Russian peasantry was prepared to enter into the struggle against landlords' estates and a test of the direction in which the struggle would proceed. Lenin

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Reply to Criticism of Our Draft Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 445.



laid special emphasis on this in struggling against ideological opponents.

In response to P. Maslov, who questioned why only the cut-off lands were being demanded, although this demand was inadequate, Lenin wrote: "*Because together with the rich peasantry the proletariat will be unable to go, and must not go, beyond the abolition of serfdom, beyond restitution of the cut-off lands, etc. Beyond that, the proletariat in general and the rural proletariat in particular will march alone, not together with the 'peasantry', not together with the rich peasant, but against him.* The reason we do not go beyond the demand for the cut-off lands is not because we do not wish the peasant well or because we are afraid of scaring the bourgeoisie, but because we do not want the rural proletariat to help the rich peasant *more than is necessary*, more than is essential to the proletariat. Both the proletarian and the rich peasant suffer from serf bondage, against *this* bondage they can and should go together; but against the *other* forms of bondage, the proletariat will go alone."

<sup>1</sup>

[Secondly, the first agrarian programme was elaborated under the influence of the economic situation of the 1890s, which was marked by the rapid growth of capitalism both in Russia and throughout Europe. Lenin was completely correct when, in his first works, he undertook to show that the dissolution of landlords' estates, the proletarianisation of the peasantry and the growth of capitalism in the countryside were proceeding at full speed. However, at the same time he emphasised that it was impossible on the basis of the existing meagre statistics alone to determine precisely how far this process had gone and whether antagonism between the rural poor and the bourgeoisie or between the entire peasantry and the landlords predominated. "The break-up of the old and obsolete order is absolutely inevitable in Russia too; but the nineteenth century (and the first seven years of the twentieth) have not yet settled the question as to which class will do the breaking-up that we need, and in what form."

<sup>2</sup>

Influenced by the contemporary economic situation, Lenin increasingly inclined to the view that capitalism had penetrated quite deeply into the rural economy and that the consolidation of large-scale capitalist forms of farming had become a reality. The same

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 444-45.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin "The Agrarian Question in Russia towards the Close of the Nineteenth Century", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 142.

opinion was held not only by Russian Marxists but also by the left wing of West European Social-Democracy. Over-estimation of capitalist development in agriculture was, of course, correspondingly reflected in the formulation of principles in the first agrarian programme of the RSDLP. This referred cautiously to the elimination of large private landholdings generally and a demand for the confiscation only of those landlords' estates which in fact constituted an organic part of peasants' farms and had been illegally taken from them under the 1861 Reform.

*The vagueness of the situation in the countryside obliged Lenin to display profound caution in formulating an agrarian programme, presenting only those demands which would deal a direct blow to feudal survivals, and to refrain from demanding complete expropriation of large private estates.* It was, moreover, unclear which turning the peasant movement would take and whether its course could be changed in such a way as not to obscure the class direction and class-consciousness of proletarian forces in the countryside. "In 1903, when the Second Congress of our Party adopted the first agrarian programme of the RSDLP, we did not yet have such experience as would enable us to judge the character, breadth, and depth of the peasant movement. The peasant risings in South Russia in the spring of 1902 remained sporadic outbursts. One can therefore understand the restraint shown by the Social-Democrats in drafting the agrarian programme: it is not the proletariat's business to 'devise' such a programme for bourgeois society, and the extent to which the peasant movement against the survivals of serfdom, a movement worthy of proletarian support, was likely to develop was still unknown".<sup>1</sup>

In the polemic with the theoreticians of Menshevism, Lenin directed attention to this more than once. The question of what would happen if the peasant committees demanded not only the cut-off lands but all the land did not embarrass the Bolsheviks in the least, he stated in "Reply to Criticism of Our Draft Programme". "We ourselves demand all the land, only, of course, not 'with a view to eradicating the remnants of the serf-owning system' (to which end the agrarian *section* of our programme limits itself), but with a view to the socialist revolution... If the demand for all the land is a demand for the nationalisation of the land or its transference to the landholding peasants of today, we shall

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, pp. 256-57.

appraise this demand from the standpoint of the proletariat's interests, taking all factors into consideration..."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin was interested above all by the balance of class forces. Even after the first peasant outbreaks, it was impossible precisely to determine the direction of this movement. In his work *To the Rural Poor*, written after the publication of the draft agrarian programme for the Second congress, Lenin explained to the peasants with remarkable simplicity the importance of the struggle for the cut-off lands as a means of expanding the class struggle in the countryside. Of course, he wrote, this is the first step in developing the revolutionary-democratic movement of the peasantry. "But can we say today, at once, what demand will be appropriate tomorrow for the second step? No, we cannot, because we do not know what stand will be taken tomorrow by the rich peasants, and by many educated people who are concerned with all kinds of co-operatives and with the land passing from capital to labour".<sup>2</sup>

*Lenin foresaw two possible outcomes to the struggle.* Should the rich peasants and the so-called educated people fail to come to an agreement with the landlords, they would want to put an end to the landlords' power once and for all. This, of course, would be the most desirable and most favourable avenue of struggle. In that case "the Social-Democrats ... will advise rural and urban proletarians to demand that all the land be taken from the landlords and transferred to the free people's state".<sup>3</sup> But there was another and more likely possibility: that the rich peasants and the "educated people" would join forces with the landlords to prevent the rural proletariat and the poor peasants from achieving victory. Under this circumstance, Lenin wrote, "it would be ridiculous for us to fight only the landlords. We would then have to fight the entire bourgeoisie and demand first of all the greatest possible freedom and elbow-room for this fight, demand better conditions of life for the workers in order to facilitate this struggle."<sup>4</sup> Thirdly in elaborating the agrarian programme Lenin was obliged to take account of the behaviour of the Menshevik leaders who, of course, had a great influence on the way any question was resolved. Since *such primary aims as the establishment of a Marxist party of a new type and the elaboration of its main strategic and tactical goals were then at the focus of attention, Lenin did not con-*

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Reply to Criticism of Our Draft Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 446.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To the Rural Poor", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 422-23.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 423.

*sider that he had the right to thrust disagreements over the agrarian question into the foreground.*

Of course, had Plekhanov and the other editors of *Iskra* adhered to a consistently Marxist standpoint in tackling the agrarian problem, the first agrarian programme of the RSDLP would undoubtedly have been more radical and more fully substantiated theoretically. However, despite all its weak points it played its historical role. *The first agrarian programme illuminated the great ideas of emancipation in the mind of the Russian peasantry and inspired it to heroic struggle under the banner of the working class and its militant vanguard—the Marxist revolutionary party. The inestimable importance of the programme lay in the fact that it promoted a gigantic expansion of the agrarian movement, which spread during the years of the first Russian revolution.*

Summing up the first Marxist agrarian programme, Lenin stated that the basic principles upon which it was built remained valid even after the first revolution. In this connection he wrote at the beginning of 1906: “Ever since they founded their Party, the Russian Social-Democrats have maintained the following three propositions. *[First]* The agrarian revolution will necessarily be a part of the democratic revolution in Russia. The content of this revolution will be the liberation of the countryside from the relations of semi-feudal bondage. *[Second]* In its social and economic aspect, the impending agrarian revolution will be a bourgeois-democratic revolution; it will not weaken but stimulate the development of capitalism and capitalist class contradictions. *[Third]* The Social-Democrats have every reason to support this revolution most resolutely, setting themselves immediate tasks, but not tying their hands by assuming commitments, and by no means refusing to support even a ‘general redistribution’.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers’ Party”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, Moscow, 1978, p. 170.

Part·II

THE AGRARIAN  
AND PEASANT QUESTION  
DURING THE TWO STAGES  
OF THE BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC  
REVOLUTION  
IN RUSSIA



## CHAPTER IV

### THE AGRARIAN QUESTION AND THE AGRARIAN PROGRAMMES OF POLITICAL PARTIES

#### DURING THE FIRST RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

##### 1. THE DEEP AGRARIAN CRISIS AND THE IMPOVERISHMENT OF THE RUSSIAN VILLAGE

By the early 20th century it became evident that Russia was breaking away from the feudal mode of production and associating itself ever closer with the capitalist mode of production. The country was going through a prolonged agonising period. The course of economic development left its mark on everything: on the one hand, Russia was able to establish a more progressive economic structure and, on the other, it was experiencing a severe agrarian crisis followed by the complete impoverishment of the Russian village, this being a result of deep-rooted serf and feudal survivals.

The condition of Russia's millions of peasants became worse from year to year. The landowners' oppression was augmented by capitalist exploitation and the arbitrariness of the satraps of the autocracy. The prevailing agrarian relations led to a further decline of the peasantry. After the Reform of 1861 over half of the peasants (almost 22 million men and women) were "freed" and provided with tiny plots of land; by 1905 of the 85-million peasant population about 70 million possessed little or no land. Of these 16,401,000 owned from 0.23 to 0.9 dessiatines per capita (one dessiatine—2.7 acres) and 53,599,000 owned from 1 to 1.75 dessiatines.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the situation, for instance, in the two agrarian gubernias<sup>2</sup> of Orel and Tula (0.57 dessiatine per capita in the former

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<sup>1</sup> See Al. Lvov, *Noviye zemelniye zakony* (New Land Laws), St. Petersburg, 1907, p. 11 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *Gubernia, uyezd, volost*—Russian administrative territorial units. The largest of these was the gubernia, divided into uyezds, which in turn were subdivided into volosts.—Tr.

and 0.59 dessiatine per capita in the latter). A crop of 45–50 poods per dessiatine, the highest for the time, meant ten poods of grain, including seed grain, per capita. This amount was scarcely enough to last six months. Therefore, close to four million peasants were condemned to semi-starvation.<sup>1</sup>

The *land question* was the sore point of the agrarian problem and affected not only the landless and land-hungry peasants, but those who had no land needs as well. The most absurd thing was the appearance of “land hunger” in a country with such vast lands as Russia. Nevertheless, it was being heatedly debated throughout the country.

The Kirghiz and Kazakh peoples, who owned hundreds of dessiatines per household, and the corn-growers of Siberia, the Trans-Volga Region, the Don and the Kuban who owned dozens of dessiatines of land per household, complained of land hunger, as did the peasants of Central Russia who owned scanty strips of land. Such were the results of the landowners’ reform. *Its inner social nature brought to life an ungovernable child, the agrarian question.* Precisely this question fired Russia’s social life and stirred the peasant masses to join the 1905 Revolution.

The peasants in the villages suffered from a lack of land; the so-called agrarian overcrowding and surplus manpower, which was mercilessly exploited by the landowners, kulaks and usurers, were felt everywhere. An extremely contradictory situation came into being: on the one hand, *the vast agrarian regions were waiting to be cultivated, while, on the other, an acute land hunger, engendered by the prevalence of landowners in the economy and by the reactionary agrarian policy of the tsarist government.*

Under certain conditions the land crowding could be, to some extent, alleviated by creating more bearable conditions for renting and purchasing land and by aiding the peasants in raising the productivity of labour and introducing new methods, but these measures were contrary to the agrarian policy of the tsarist government.

Prices for land were very high and increased from year to year. For instance, the price of one dessiatine of land increased from 45.4 rubles in 1883 to 104.9 rubles in 1905; land rent was, as a rule, higher than the peasants’ net profit.

In most cases a number of slave-like conditions were stipulated by the leases, such as, for instance, to plough, mow, gather and

<sup>1</sup> Central State History Archives of the USSR (further—CSHA), f. 1212, d. 1, 1. 118.



thresh a certain amount of grain on the landowner's property during the busy season.

However, the tremendous sums which the peasants continued to pay out for their strips of land according to the terms of the 1861 Reform were the heaviest burden. The tsarist government, which protected the interests of the landowners, brutally exacted these payments. All members of a village commune were bound by a collective responsibility and were accountable for the non-payers. Such measures as making the defaulters and their families work off their debt, the sale of property, corporal punishment, etc., were widely used. Thus, in 1891 a total of 768 peasants were sentenced to working off their debts. In the 1890s in a number of uyezds of Samara Gubernia the peasants' property was distrained for a sum of nine million rubles; nevertheless, by 1892 the arrears amounted to 71.9 per cent of the annual payment.<sup>1</sup>

The peasants' arrears grew from year to year: in 1875 they totalled to 29 million rubles, in 1885 to 38 million rubles, in 1890 to 50 million rubles, in 1895 to 102 million rubles and in 1900 to 119 million rubles. It may be said that most of the peasant households were in arrears.<sup>2</sup>

According to statistics, by January 1907 the peasants had paid out 2.5 billion rubles for their land holdings, which exceeded by far the actual cost of the land. Yet, they still owed 1,107 million rubles. The peasants paid dearly for the "emancipatory" Reform of 1861. Tremendous payments for land plots, high land rents, exaggerated prices for land and various taxes consumed most of the peasants' income.

The decrease in livestock in the peasant household is a further indication of the impoverishment of the Russian village: in 1860 there were 30 horses, 41 heads of cattle and 88 sheep per 100 peasants; in 1900 these figures dwindled to 23, 36 and 55 respectively. In 1905, 29 per cent of all households did not own a horse, 30 per cent owned one horse, 22 per cent owned two horses and only 19 per cent owned several horses.

The Russian peasants were actually deprived of all means of existence, and there was no way of improving the situation. The peasant was constantly fighting hunger. He possessed neither the means nor the strength to build up his "economic prosperity" which was promised to him by the 1861 Reform. "The peasant

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<sup>1</sup> See I. Moszhukhin, *The Agrarian Question in Actual Figures and Facts*, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> CSHA USSR, f. 1212, d. 1, l. 119.

was reduced to beggary. He lived together with his cattle, was clothed in rags, and fared on weeds; he fled from his allotment, if he had anywhere to go, and even *paid* to be relieved of it, if he could induce anyone to take over a plot of land, the payments on which exceeded the income it yielded. The peasants were in a state of chronic starvation, and they died by the tens of thousands from famine and epidemics in bad harvest years, which recurred with increasing frequency."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the situation could be improved by diverting part of the peasantry to the cities and employing them in industry, but such a possibility was extremely limited in Russia. If, in the countries of Western Europe, the migration of the rural population to the cities took place on a wide scale, in Russia this process was extremely slow. Thus, during the second half of the 19th century in Western Europe the urban population increased: in Austria (1843-1900) from 19 to 38 per cent; in France (1846-1901) from 24 to 41 per cent; in Germany (1846-1912) from 36 to 56 per cent,<sup>2</sup> while in Russia the urban population increased from 9.94 per cent in 1863 to 12.76 per cent in 1897.

*The main question in West European countries was the question of the working class, while in Russia one of the central issues was the agrarian and peasant question.* Russia suffered mostly not from developed capitalism and its attributes, but from its acute underdevelopment, from the prevailing medieval agricultural relations and the landowners' despotism.

The Russian village was on the verge of disaster. Constant crop failures followed by famine and epidemics resulted, as a rule, in the dying out of whole villages, volosts and even uyezds. Especially disastrous was the famine of 1891 that gave start to an agrarian crisis which Russia could not overcome in the course of many years. The mortality among the peasantry was higher than in any developed European country.

It is interesting to note that in all European countries the mortality of the rural population was lower than that of the urban population. For instance, the mortality rate per thousand was: in England 26 in the cities and 19 in the villages; in France the figures were 30 and 23 respectively, while in Russia we find a contrary correlation: 35 in the villages and 30 in the cities. In the famine year of 1892 mortality reached 40 per thousand and was

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Workers' Party and the Peasantry", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 422.

<sup>2</sup> See I. Moszhukhin, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

still higher in some agricultural regions. In Voronezh Gubernia it reached 46 per thousand, in Saratov and Penza gubernias 45, in Samara Gubernia 43 and in Tula Gubernia 42. In ordinary years the mortality rate was never lower than 34 people per thousand.<sup>1</sup>

The hard living conditions of the peasantry turned into a national disaster which threatened the very existence of the state. Things were so bad that the number of people called up for military service from the villages was constantly decreasing.

(This was a result of the anti-popular policy of the landowner tsarist government, aimed at preserving the medieval forms of land-ownership and robbing the peasant masses. The peasants' lack of rights, large taxes, exaggerated redemption and rent payments, primitive implements, the prevalence of the three-field and even fallow land agricultural systems hindered the development of agriculture and condemned the peasantry to poverty and extinction.)

Many government inspectors who studied the condition of the peasantry were obliged to admit the existence of the above-mentioned processes in the villages. Following are the most frank statements by the representatives of the nobility and landowners. Kleigels, Governor-General of the South-Western Territory wrote in his report to the government that he had personally inspected the condition of the rural population of the territory and had been convinced of its rich resources and abject poverty. "The villages are poor and will become still poorer, not because the peasants have too little land, but because our policy has always been directed towards extorting all possible means from the villages.... The Russian peasant has common sense, but not material possibilities nor the means to utilise the productivity of his many-million-strong labour force by common sense alone.... In the 45 years since the peasants were freed, billions of rubles were taken from them ... at least part of this sum has to be returned to them, and not as a dole, but for enlivening their industrial talents."<sup>2</sup>

Another government councillor, Shiffers, reported: "Foreign political economists consider our domestic and financial policies during the past ten years to be extremely ruinous, because the increasing needs of the peasantry have been ignored. The negative results of our utterly bureaucratic system as concerns the national economy has remained incomprehensible and, naturally, unpredict-

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<sup>1</sup> See A. A. Kaufman, *Agrarny vopros v Rossii* (The Agrarian Question in Russia), Moscow, 1918, p. 58 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *Agrarny vopros v Sovete ministrov (1906 g.)* (The Agrarian Question in the Council of Ministers [1906]), Moscow-Leningrad, 1924, p. 170 (in Russian).

able." Both Russian and foreign scholars, according to Shiffers, agreed that the reason for this was to be found in the position of the Russian peasantry which was "*neglected, uneducated and oppressed morally and materially*".<sup>1</sup>

Thus, there arose an urgent economic need to cast off the fetters of the landownership, which bound Russia so tightly. The big landed estates system was to be done away with, the old agrarian relations had to be broken up and new, progressive forms of landownership, which would promote an intensive development of agriculture, had to be established.)

## 2. THE UPSURGE OF THE PEASANT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

The peoples of tsarist Russia suffered from three types of oppression: *political, socio-economic and national*. The condition of the peasantry, the most numerous class in the country, was the hardest. By the beginning of the 20th century the agrarian and peasant question, which had been ripening since the "emancipatory" Reform of 1861, reached such a state that it could not be solved by any but constructive measures. Frederick Engels, who foresaw this situation, wrote in his article "On the Social Question in Russia": "In European Russia the peasants possess 105 million dessiatines, the nobility (as I shall here term the big landowners for the sake of brevity) 100 million dessiatines of land, of which about half belong to 15,000 nobles.... The peasants, from their half, pay 195 million rubles land tax annually, the nobles—13 million!" Engels noted the numerous taxes and payments and stressed that "the condition of the Russian peasants since the emancipation from serfdom has become intolerable and cannot be maintained much longer, and that for this reason alone if for no other a revolution is in the offing in Russia. The question is only: what can be, what will be the result of this revolution?"<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, *the patience of the people was exhausted to such an extent that the peasants could no longer put up with the existing situation*. They rose up spontaneously to fight their oppressors. In the early 20th century all signs indicated the advent of dramatic events in the villages. Collisions between the peasants and the land-

<sup>1</sup> CSHA USSR, f. 1212, d. 1, 1. 117 (italics mine.—S. T.).

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1969, pp. 388, 390.

owners and authorities, which usually ended only after the interference of the police and army, were taking place everywhere. The landowners of Voronezh Gubernia gave a vivid description of the situation in the villages. They wrote in August 1901: "We can feel something ominous in the air: every day we see a glow of fire in the distance; a bloody mist covers the ground, it is hard to breathe and live, as if before a storm. The peasants are grim and silent and if they sometimes utter a few words it makes your flesh creep."<sup>1</sup>

By the spring of 1902 the undercurrent of dissatisfaction turned into major revolutionary actions by the peasants in many gubernias which were especially strong in the southern part of Russia, the Volga Region and the Central Black-Earth Belt. The peasants of Konstantinograd Uyezd of Poltava Gubernia were the first to rebel, and were soon followed by the peasants of many other uyezds of the same gubernia, as well as by the peasants of Kharkov Gubernia. About 100 landowners' estates were razed in these two gubernias.

Peasant unrest enveloped Chernigov, Kherson, Ekaterinoslav and Bessarabia gubernias and later Saratov, Samara, Penza, Tambov, Voronezh and other gubernias. Peasant rebellions took place in almost all of the country's agrarian regions. The scope of the movement was so large that the police and gendarmes were helpless and troops were called in to help. The tsarist government brutally suppressed these rebellions: punitive expeditions brought savage reprisals, massacres and mass arrests.

However, the peasant actions had definite consequences, for they drew the attention of all the country's social forces to the condition of the peasantry. The government, too, took notice. Of interest, to this end, is a memorandum by Grigory Kovalensky, who conducted the investigation of the peasant uprisings in Poltava and Kharkov gubernias. He wrote that too many "combustibles have accumulated, and one spark is sufficient to start a fire".<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Kovalensky noted another important feature: the element of organisation of the peasant masses, the existence in villages of active peasant agitators, readiness to receive revolutionary information and thirst for books and leaflets. The author also

<sup>1</sup> See Pyotr Maslov, "Krestyanskiye dvizheniya v Rossii" (*Agrarny vopros v Rossii*) ["The Peasant Movements in Russia" (*The Agrarian Question in Russia*)], Vol. II, Part I, Moscow, 1923, p. 102 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> See V. I. Picheta, *Istoriya krestyanskikh volnenii v Rossii* (*The History of Peasant Disorders in Russia*), Minsk, 1923, p. 145 (italics mine.—S.T.) (in Russian).

pointed out that although the disorders were put down, they might be repeated if the "necessary measures" were not taken. In any case, the repressive measures of the government could not stop the popular movement: "Repressions will not cure the serious disease of our peasantry".<sup>1</sup>

This was, undoubtedly, a sensible estimation of the situation in the villages. Indeed, after the brutal repressions the peasant movement abated, but only temporarily. At the end of 1904, and especially in the beginning of 1905, it broke out with unprecedented force, provoked by the Russo-Japanese War.

At the beginning of 1905 peasant uprisings enveloped 74 uyezds in the European part of Russia and were especially strong in the autumn, when revolutionary actions broke out in the cities. By that time the peasant revolts had taken place in 240 uyezds, i. e. in almost half of the uyezds of the European part of Russia. There were major revolutionary struggles in the Baltic Territory and in the Caucasus.

After abating somewhat during the winter of 1906, agrarian rebellions broke out again in the summer, reaching the same extent as they had in the autumn of 1905, and unfolding in a number of places under the leadership of the working class. The movement became more organised, merging with the developing revolution in the cities and obtaining a class character. It enveloped the uyezds in which there was a significant differentiation of

	1905			1906			1907		
	January — April	May — August	September — December	January — April	May — August	September — December	January — April	May — August	September — December
Uyezds enveloped by the movement	85	104	261	21	250	72	41	28	3
Percentage to the number of uyezds in European Russia	17	21	52	24	50	14	8.8	5.6	0.6

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.* (italics mine.—S. T.).

the peasantry, with the highest percentage of households with little land and no horses.<sup>1</sup>

*The forms of the agrarian movement and the methods and means of the struggle of the peasant masses for abolishing the old, outdated socio-economic relations took shape during the first Russian revolution.*

The routing of landowners' estates and reprisals against the hated landowners was the prevalent form of the agrarian movement in the Central Black-Earth Belt where the peasants suffered most from feudal survivals. When wrecking the landowners' estates, the peasants counted on having the land distributed among the working peasantry.

Landowners' mansions were often burnt down to retaliate for the reprisals meted out by the police and troops brought in by the authorities. These forms of struggle were especially widespread as the revolutionary struggle abated and it was impossible to fight openly.

The felling of timber in landowners' and state forests was another form of struggle in both the northern regions, rich in forests, and the southern regions, with hardly any forests at all. Landowners' fields were damaged by cattle, the seized lands were ploughed, sowed areas reaped and meadows mowed, and hay and grain seized. These forms were used mostly by the middle peasants who possessed the necessary implements and horses.

The so-called tenant movement aimed at lowering rents on land or transferring it to those who tilled it was widespread in the regions with capitalist agriculture. Still another form the peasant movement took on was the farm labourers' strikes which occurred mostly in the southern and south-eastern regions and in the Baltic Area, where there was a strong agricultural proletariat. Thanks to the improved organisation of the peasantry in some areas they managed to turn out the local authorities and destroy the old order. Such was the case in the Central Industrial Region and in the western gubernias, where the peasants often set up their own administration (see table on p. 116).

Thus, the peasant movement which developed under the impact of the revolutionary struggle of the working class became very strong. The peasant opposition to the landowners' arbitrariness, beginning with uncoordinated, spontaneous actions, developed

<sup>1</sup> See Y. A. Morokhovets, *Krestyanskoye dvizheniye i sotsial-demokratiya v epokhu pervoi russkoi revoliutsii* (The Peasant Movement and Social-Democracy During the First Russian Revolution), Moscow-Leningrad, 1926, p. 10 (in Russian).

into a powerful movement against the fetters of the hard land use conditions and was becoming organised and revolutionary in character.

The peasantry was ready for a general armed uprising. The landowners knew the hatred of the people and were helpless to withstand their formidable class enemy. In this revolutionary storm the landowners lost all hope of being protected by the police and the army. The government received telegrams and letters from the nobility with requests for protection from the revolutionary peasantry.

V. Kailensky, a rich landowner from Sudzhan Uyezd, Kursk Gubernia, wrote in his memorandum to the tsar: "The agrarian movement, which has spread violently through a number of gubernias and which threatens to become still more powerful by spring, calls for at least temporary palliative measures to hold back the peasant masses that are excited by the thought of seizing the landowners' and other lands.... Save Russia and us, who are helpless."<sup>1</sup>

The peasant revolutionary movement of 1905-06 demonstrated the great strength of the peasant masses and, which was also important, the fact that the tsarist regime had completely lost the support of the peasantry. During the autumn of 1905 close to 2,000 landed estates were razed and nearly 900 divided up between the peasants, with damages amounting to 30 million rubles in gold.

Russia of the landowners was, for the first time, confronted with a severe political and socio-economic shock from which it never recovered. The agrarian movement was based on objective conditions which prepared the ground for a radical change in agriculture with the old relations of production being replaced by new ones capable of clearing the way for the development of productive forces in agriculture. It is no mere chance that the peasants' main struggle was directed towards abolishing the existing medieval relations which were an obstacle in the economic development of the country. This contradiction is one of the most characteristic features in the development of the Russian villages in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, i. e. the clash between feudal relations and capitalism's inexorable penetration into agriculture.

(Under the influence of deep socio-economic changes, the agrarian question became a major political question occupying a central place in the work of the first two Dumas. It was now evident that the post-Reform agrarian policy pursued by feudal landlords

<sup>1</sup> *The Agrarian Question in the Council of Ministers (1906)*, pp. 88, 93.



Forms of Peasant Movement  
(1905-07)

Regions	total number of uyezds	yezds involved in the movement	percentage	Timber felling		Damage of fields and seizure of hay		Seizure of grain		Unauthorised tilling		Rioting		Tenants' strikes		Farm labourers' strikes	
				number of uyezds	percentage	number of uyezds	percentage	number of uyezds	percentage	number of uyezds	percentage	number of uyezds	percentage	number of uyezds	percentage	number of uyezds	percentage
Central Black-Earth . . . . .	75	68	90.7	45	66.2	47	69.1	18	26.5	7	10.3	54	76.5	28	41.2	46	67.7
Middle Volga . . . . .	51	45	88.2	39	86.7	26	57.8	14	31.1	18	40.0	30	66.7	12	26.7	16	35.6
Lower Volga . . . . .	17	9	52.9	6	66.7	7	77.8	2	22.2	4	44.4	7	77.8	4	44.4	1	11.1
Novorossiisk . . . . .	39	32	82.1	16	50.0	13	40.6	7	21.9	17	53.1	19	59.4	22	68.8	17	53.1
South-West . . . . .	36	35	97.2	19	54.3	22	62.9	5	14.3	8	22.9	9	25.7	8	22.9	31	88.6
The Ukraine . . . . .	41	41	100.0	28	68.3	29	70.7	11	26.8	5	12.2	26	63.4	26	63.4	35	85.4
Central Industrial . . . . .	71	45	63.4	38	84.4	19	42.2	—	—	7	15.6	4	8.9	3	6.7	8	17.8
Byelorussian . . . . .	43	39	90.7	33	84.6	6	15.4	—	—	5	12.8	6	15.4	—	—	25	64.1
The Urals . . . . .	29	11	37.9	10	90.9	2	18.2	—	—	—	—	1	9.1	—	—	—	—
North . . . . .	19	9	47.4	9	100.0	2	22.1	—	—	1	11.1	—	—	2	22.1	1	11.1
The Lakes . . . . .	34	23	67.6	20	87.0	12	52.2	2	8.7	2	8.7	3	13.0	4	17.4	10	43.5
Lithuanian . . . . .	23	17	73.9	13	76.5	10	58.8	2	11.8	4	23.5	—	—	—	—	14	82.4

had brought Russia to the brink of disaster. The bankruptcy of this policy was noted not only by the opposition parties, but by the bourgeois-monarchist parties as well.

In his memoirs Count Witte recalls that the well-known reactionary Dubasov, on his return from an "expedition" to suppress peasant disturbances in the autumn of 1905, during which he became aware of the peasants' sentiments, persistently recommended Witte (at that time the head of government) to urgently adopt a law legalising possession by the peasants of lands they had seized from the landowners. "He pointed out that this was the only measure capable of calming down the peasantry, otherwise 'you will see how they seize all the lands, and you will not be able to do anything about it'." <sup>1</sup>

This was said by the very same Dubasov who was soon appointed Governor-General of Moscow and gained ill-fame for his brutal suppression of the armed uprising of Moscow's workers. Another hangman, General Trepov, Palace Commandant, shared Dubasov's opinion: "I am a landowner myself," he told Witte, "and would gladly give away half of my lands, for I am positive this is the only way to save the other half." <sup>2</sup>

These statements reveal the effects of the peasant movement in Russia. It became evident that there were no means to preserve the old, medieval relations in the villages. There was a saying at the time: "One cannot be sustained by bayonets for long". Witte was also compelled to admit this. In summarising the panic in the government, he said that "*the regime which ruled Russia has proved itself a failure and rotten*." <sup>3</sup>

Russia of the workers and peasants was advancing along a path of revolution to destroy the old order, and towards decisive social change.

### 3. THE AGRARIAN MEASURES OF THE GOVERNMENT- AND ITS SEARCH FOR WAYS OF ACHIEVING A NEW AGRARIAN REFORM

The tsar and the landowners, shocked by the peasant revolutionary movement, were once again the first to speak, as they had before the "emancipatory" reform, for a new agrarian reform

<sup>1</sup> S. Yu. Witte, *Vospominaniya* (Reminiscences), Vol. 3, Moscow, 1960, p. 198 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1960, p. 559 (italics mine.-S.T.).

from the top, fearing that the peasant masses would achieve it from the bottom. These tactics were well known to the ruling classes, and now they were following a beaten track. The tsar's edict on a revision of all laws concerning peasantry "on the basis of the main principles of the 19 February, 1861 Statute" appeared in January 1902.

A "revisionary commission" was then appointed, headed by Steshinsky, Deputy Minister of the Interior, which pursued a course of "tightening up the screws". It began by working out measures for forcefully suppressing the peasantry and restricting revolutionary propaganda in the villages. By the end of 1903 the commission had prepared drafts of the revised legislation concerning the peasantry. These were followed in January by a decree On Establishing Gubernia Conferences for Revising the Peasant Legislation.

Another commission, the so-called Special Conference on the Needs of the Agricultural Industry, headed by Count Witte, was founded in October 1902 and existed at the same time as the first. Special Conference founded gubernia and uyezd committees which included representatives of the nobility, the Zemstvo and a small number of peasant representatives. Both committees were obviously reactionary; instead of improving the lot of the peasantry they focussed their attention on protecting the landowners and the nobility, urging the government to adopt stronger repressions against the peasantry.

Nevertheless, in some committees sensible voices called for agrarian reforms that would ease the lot of the peasants. These voices belonged mostly to Zemstvo and peasant representatives. The committees of those gubernias in which large peasant rebellions had taken place were most concerned about the existing situation.

Although the work of the gubernia and uyezd committees, and of the Special Conference produced no practical results, by collecting vast data on peasant life they undoubtedly gave impetus to the development of oppositional trends and activated the liberal forces.

By founding numerous committees and commissions, the tsarist government tried to create an impression of its concern for the peasants. Indeed, during the first five years of the 20th century Russian agrarian legislation was full of numerous edicts and decrees, though the government had no intention of solving the agrarian question in favour of the peasants by applying them. It was obvious that the government was just manoeuvring.

As curtailed as the agrarian legislation was, the government, threatened by the revolutionary peasant masses, was compelled to give in, inch by inch, and take measures to change the peasants' legal status and economic position. Thus, in March 1903 a law was passed abolishing the collective responsibility of the peasant communes in respect of negligent payers or non-payers. In August corporal punishment "for rural citizens" was abolished, etc.

However, to replace this the government hastily issued new, more "modern" laws. For instance, in May 1903 it issued a law appointing police guards in the villages of 46 gubernias. Such measures were taken towards those gubernias where peasant uprisings had taken place.

Even the most curtailed laws in favour of the peasants came into being after prolonged discussions and correction, and had endless reservations and commentaries. Often one law was immediately followed by another which abolished it.

There was considerable disagreement in government circles on all the points of the agrarian policy between those who stood for the complete preservation of the old agrarian order and those who supported the implementation of some agrarian reforms in order to appease the peasantry. These disagreements arose from the start in the Special Conference, headed by Witte, and the Legislative Commission of the Ministry of the Interior, headed by Steshinsky. The former suggested a gradual alteration of the communal ownership of the land and elimination of the peasantry's seclusion, while the latter proposed a contrary solution and demanded all possible measures be taken to preserve the seclusion of the peasantry and support the existence of an agrarian commune, its customs and traditions.

This "struggle between two trends" in the government reached a peak during discussions on the draft agrarian reforms proposed by Migulin and Kutler.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there was hardly any difference between the two drafts and these chiefly applied to the general tone and argumentation. Both drafts revealed anxiety for the fate of the monarchy in view of the growing revolutionary

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<sup>1</sup> Migulin, Professor of Financial Law (Kharkov). On recommendation from General Trepov, then in command of the punitive expeditions to the south of Russia, he was received by the tsar and expounded on his draft for an agrarian reform, according to which privately-owned lands would be compulsorily alienated. At the tsar's order the draft was considered by the Council of Ministers and was rejected. Soon after a draft for a similar reform, drawn up by Kutler, so-

agrarian movement and were aimed at checking the peasants' revolutionary onslaught.

Though the drafts were very moderate, they did refer to the peasants' dire need for land, the abject decline of the peasant economies and the inevitability of a new and stronger surge of the peasant movement. The drafts suggested such measures as alienation of part of the private land, to be given over to the peasants for payment; extending the activity of the Peasant Bank; stimulation of peasant ownership of land and increasing migration of peasants to new regions. Witte presented a clear picture of the aims of the new agrarian reform in his report to the tsar: "It is more preferable for the landowners to give up part of their lands, as they did in 1861, and secure the rest, than to lose everything they have under quite unfavourable conditions."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, after prolonged discussions in the numerous agrarian commissions and committees, the supporters of a "tough" agrarian course, i. e. of preserving the old order and defending it by the police, were victorious. As a result, the first Special Conference was dissolved in March 1905 and replaced by the second Special Conference, which was to discuss "Measures for Stimulating Peasant Ownership of Land" under the chairmanship of Goremykin, a reactionary and later head of the government.<sup>2</sup>

However, the new government was not able to maintain its "tough" agrarian course, for the pressure of the revolutionary peasant movement was *so strong that it threatened not only the big landed estates, but the monarchy as well*. The new government encountered obstacles it could not overcome and, though it broke up the disobedient First Duma, it fell under the pressure of the revolutionary forces.

Life demanded the immediate achievement of a new agrarian reform, the only means of preventing a catastrophe. The ruling classes were facing a serious threat to their existence. Not only did they proclaim a new agrarian course, but also put forward its executor, Stolypin.

called head of land use and land tenure, and Kaufman, a well-known economist and statistician, was presented to the Council of Ministers. The majority opposed the draft. Later, on the tsar's demand, Kutler resigned. This meant that the tsar and the government strongly opposed any compulsory alienation of privately-owned land and any changes in the existing agrarian order.

<sup>1</sup> *The Agrarian Question in the Council of Ministers (1906)*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> Goremykin was opposed to all agrarian reforms. Prior to the opening of the Duma, he said that it would be immediately dissolved if it discussed the compulsory alienation of private land. After becoming head of the government, he did away with the Duma without delay.

#### 4. THE AGRARIAN POLICY AND THE TACTICS OF THE BOURGEOIS-MONARCHIST PARTIES

The powerful revolutionary upsurge of the workers and peasants stirred the country to action. A large number of political parties, each of which tried to pose as a major social force, especially in agrarian policy, appeared at that time in Russia, where no legal parties had ever existed before.<sup>1</sup>

According to the number of published programmes, over twenty-five legal and illegal parties appeared on the eve and in the course of the first revolution. Counting the independent trends and groups within the parties, their number would be close to fifty. These numerous parties with different programmes and platforms did nothing to solve the agrarian question, on the contrary, they only confused and complicated it.

Most of the parties were reactionary and aimed at consolidating the pillars of the landowner-autocratic order. The tsarist government had nothing to fear from these parties. It rather relied on them. Therefore, by allowing this plurality the government hoped that the sham democratisation of the social order would weaken the revolutionary movement in the country, divert the attention of the workers and peasants from the political and class struggle, strengthen the position of the ruling classes and thus do away with the approaching revolution.

In the new political situation the bourgeois-monarchist parties, with political programmes that hardly differed from each other, were the stronghold of the autocracy. Their agrarian programmes were aimed at preserving the landed estates and at strengthening the monarchist state. Following is a short account of the position of these parties regarding the agrarian question.

*The monarchists-absolutists formed the spearhead of the tsarist reactionary forces. Their party united such obscurantist terrorist organisations as the Black Hundreds, and others. The party's main principles governing the agrarian programme were: inviolability of*

<sup>1</sup> Of interest in this respect is *Sravnitel'naya tablitsa russkikh politicheskikh partii* (The Comparative Table of Russian Political Parties) (Petrograd, 1917) by L. A. Velikhov. On the basis of the published programmes of the parties, the author analysed the conditions under which they appeared, their socio-political orientation and demands. He stressed that he did so impartially. I have also reviewed: A. Nishchensky, *Polny sbornik programm vseh politicheskikh partii v Rossii* (A Complete Collection of Programmes of All Political Parties in Russia) (Finland, 1917); and *Sbornik programm politicheskikh partii v Rossii. Partii demokraticheskoye* (Collection of the Programmes of Political Parties in Russia. Democratic Parties) (Petrograd, 1917) (both in Russian).

the property right of big landowners and ruthless struggle against all who would encroach upon this right. The Black-Hundred gangs organised punitive expeditions to the villages and massacred peasants.

The so-called *monarchists-nationalists*, rabid supporters of the autocracy and the existing order, who went along with the Black-Hundred gangs, were represented by a network of reactionary parties: the Party of the Russian Assembly, the Party of the People's Centre, the Union of the Russian People, the Slavophiles, the Patriotic Union, and the Tsarists. Their agrarian programmes proclaimed that "compulsory alienation of private land is inadmissible and agrarian unrest must be mercilessly suppressed".

Nevertheless, even these most reactionary monarchist parties were compelled to admit the need for measures directed towards the improvement of agriculture. These measures included: "Enlarging peasant-owned lands; improving agriculture; developing domestic crafts" (Party of the Russian Assembly); "increasing peasant-owned lands through alienation of part of big landed estates with fair remuneration; merciless suppression of agrarian unrest" (Party of the People's Centre); "change of the communal system; increasing plots of poor peasants, favouring migration" (Union of the Russian People); "any compulsory alienation of big landed estates is inadmissible; other measures aimed at improving the life of the peasants should be carried out by the government" (the Patriotic Union); "the transition from communal to household ownership of the land. Solving the problem of land-hungry peasants through state subsidies. Reorganisation of the Peasant and Noblemen's banks into an Imperial Land Bank for all estates" (the Tsarists).

As we see, all those agrarian programmes are focussed on the preservation and defence of landed estates, and inviolability of the "sacred" property of the nobility and landowners. The parties concerned shaped their tactics to suit their political aims. The Party of the Russian Assembly stated in its programme: "The tactics of our party include struggle against the revolutionary forces, as well as against all liberal trends." At the same time, these parties endeavoured to adapt to the existing political situation and were cautious in their activities. The programme of the Tsarists proves this very well: "The party recommends that the Government follows a necessarily cautious policy because of unfavourable circumstances."

The *monarchists-constitutionalists* were closer to the Centre and included the following parties: the Party of Law and Order, the

Union of October 17th, the Commercial and Industrial Party, the Progressive-Economic Party, the Moderate Progressive Party and the Democratic Union of Constitutionalists. Their agrarian programmes admitted that the peasants were land-hungry, and attempted to solve the agrarian question. The principal points in their agrarian programmes were similar: the right of peasants to withdraw from the commune; transition from communal to private and household landownership; alienation of landed estates with "fair" remuneration; encouragement of resettlement and migration of the peasants; establishment of a state bank, providing land credits, etc.

The *tactics* of these parties were largely as follows: first, strict observance of the tsar's Manifesto of 17 October 1905 and establishment of law and order in accordance with its principles; second, early calling of the Duma; third, combatting all extreme trends, and consolidating the autocracy and the existing law and order. The tactics of these parties were based on adaptation, pleading, and advice to guarantee a constitution while preserving the monarchy. These parties, which represented the interests of merchant and industrial circles, were mostly concerned with preventing any union between workers and peasants.

And, finally, the *Left wing*, the so-called *monarchists-democrats*, which included such reactionary parties as the Constitutional-Democratic Party (the Cadets), the Free-thinkers, the Radical Party, and others. Their agrarian programmes were more definite: increasing tenure areas out of state, Cabinet and monastery land; alienation of privately-owned land "with fair remuneration"; establishing a reserve of land and renting it out to peasants; land credit and resettlement; intensification of agriculture, etc.

Following are the demands of the Cadets, the largest and most influential bourgeois-monarchist party: "Increasing tenure areas out of state, Cabinet and monastery land, and by alienation of privately-owned land with fair remuneration (not at prevailing market prices); organising resettlement and migration, and settling land disputes; reviewing rent relations and establishing an agricultural inspection."

*The tactics of the monarchists-democrats differed little from those of the monarchists-constitutionalists, save that the former attempted to pose as "an independent opposition", pretending that they stood for genuine reforms.* All these parties were faithful advocates of the monarchy. Only their fear of the growing popular revolution made them disguise themselves as an opposition.

Even a brief examination of the agrarian programmes of the



bourgeois-monarchist parties shows what methods they chose for solving the agrarian question in Russia. Regardless of differences in wording and various nuances, the political approach was reactionary, directed to protecting and preserving the property rights of the big landowners and suppressing the revolutionary peasant movement. However, the appearance of numerous agrarian programmes, though reactionary in character, was of great political importance for it spoke of an imminent crisis of the old agrarian relations, on the one hand, and of the unconcealed fear the ruling classes had of the revolutionary peasant movement, on the other.

Thus, the bourgeois-monarchist parties, which tried to paralyse the revolutionary forces, to calm the peasant masses, to reconcile them with the tsar and the landowners and isolate them from the influence of the working class, represented the most extreme right wing. The above-mentioned author of the table of political parties revealed the exact political orientation of these parties. He made it clear that *the monarchists-absolutists and monarchists-nationalists actually formed one governmental party, the Party of Order, while the monarchists-constitutionalists and monarchists-democrats were another governmental party, the Party of the Mildest Reforms.*

The following table gives a clear picture of the political and class nature of these parties and their aims, policies and tactics.

Political orientation	Programme demands	Tactics
Monarchists-absolutists	The tsar rules, the people obey	Terrorism; merciless suppression of democratic rights
Monarchists-nationalists	The tsar decides, representatives of a part of the people advise	Reactionism; to preserve the autocracy and the existing system of law and order at all costs
Monarchists-constitutionalists	The tsar and representatives of the people decide jointly	Law-breaking; a constitutionalism alongside the autocracy
Monarchists-democrats	The people's representatives decide, the tsar approves	Oppositionism; prevail upon the tsar by peaceful means in order to bring about reforms and amendments

None of these parties threatened the autocracy or its political and economic system; but one should never forget that the revolution had left a mark on the bourgeois-monarchist parties, forcing them to revise their agrarian policy and begin working on a new agrarian reform. Lenin noted that in the course of the revolution "the Right landlords displayed the clearest understanding of their class interests, the most distinct conception of both the economic and political conditions needed for the preservation of their class rule in bourgeois Russia".<sup>1</sup>

This change in the policy of these parties was manifested in the First and Second Dumas. The right-wing monarchist parties were forced to admit the necessity for a capitalist course of development in agriculture and for replacing communal ownership of land by private peasant landownership. "The Black-Hundred landlords ... have realised that the path for the development of Russia *cannot* be cleared unless the rusty medieval forms of landownership are forcibly broken up. And they have boldly set out to break them up *in the interests of the landlords*. They have thrown overboard the sympathy for the semi-feudal village commune which until recently was widespread among the bureaucracy and the landlords. They have evaded all the 'constitutional' laws in order to break up the village communes by force."<sup>2</sup>

Noting the inconsistency and uncertainty of the liberal bourgeoisie, Lenin showed that the Cadet Party was in one camp with the reactionaries. The Cadets stood between the right and left trends and deliberately obscured the class nature of the agrarian question, while seeking a deal with Black-Hundred landlords. "In effect, the liberals aligned themselves with these landlords and sought to betray the peasants to them by the most despicable and hypocritical methods."<sup>3</sup>

Summing up his analysis of the agrarian programmes of the reactionary political parties, Lenin indicated that all of them had common class roots fed by the same source: preservation of the old agrarian order and attempts to fit it to the needs of capitalist development by means of a half-baked reform. "All the Black-Hundred landlords, all the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie (including the Octobrists and the Cadets) stand for private ownership of the land."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 420.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 420-21.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 425.

## 5. PETTY-BOURGEOIS PARTIES AND THEIR REVOLUTIONARY-DEMOCRATIC AGRARIAN DEMANDS

The revolutionary upsurge brought to the surface numerous petty-bourgeois parties which represented the interests and ideology of the more prosperous peasantry. These were, first, the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries and its offshoots: the *Maximalists*, *Popular Socialists* and *Trudoviks*. Other petty-bourgeois parties, too, were close to the Socialist-Revolutionaries, such as the *Independent Workers' Party*, the *Anarchists* and, the *Tolstovtsy* party, which, though not registered, was run from a single centre.

Their agrarian programmes, despite class limitations and lack of scientific grounding were contributed to the struggle against the country's reactionary forces. Therefore, it is proper to examine their agrarian programmes more closely, particularly the first three. The characteristic feature of all petty-bourgeois parties and trends is that they do not understand the laws of social and economic development, and especially the laws of the class struggle. Not by chance are their agrarian programmes dominated by the petty-bourgeois idea of "equality" and "brotherhood", though they suggest different means of struggle for these aims.<sup>1</sup>

The Socialist-Revolutionary Party was the most influential among the peasantry, for its agrarian programme fully reflected the petty-bourgeois peasant psychology and the traditional peasant instinct of private ownership. It was, actually, a peasant party, which proclaimed "defence of the interests of the peasants" as its main purpose. It was formed in 1901 from separate groups of the disintegrated Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) Party, whose theory was espoused by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. They regarded their activity as part of the world labour's struggle against exploitation, and themselves as one of the detachments of

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<sup>1</sup> This can most clearly be seen from the example of two parties, the Anarchists and the Tolstovtsy, who proclaimed contrary means of struggle, although the nature of their agrarian programmes was actually the same. The main agrarian demand of the Anarchists was "the land belongs to no one and is tilled by free communes". The Tolstovtsy expressed the same demand in slightly different terms: "The land is in general use, as is water and air." The same idea can be found in the agrarian programmes of the other above-mentioned parties: "The land belongs to no one", "The land is God's gift and may be used by everyone", etc.

"the army of international socialism"<sup>1</sup>; their party was an active member of the Second International.

It saw its main political task in revolutionary struggle against the autocracy, not only by arousing mass discontent against the monarchy, but by wide use of individual terrorism against the most obnoxious representatives of the government. The ultimate task of this struggle was to overthrow the autocracy and convene a Constituent Assembly which was to establish a democratic republic in Russia and a new agrarian order in accordance with the nature of this republic.

*Though the Socialist-Revolutionary Party proclaimed itself a socialist party, it had nothing in common with the Marxist ideas of scientific socialism.* The Socialist-Revolutionaries betrayed complete ignorance of the laws of economic development. In theory they stood for a non-capitalist way of development in agriculture and were against the bourgeois idea of private ownership, while in practice their agrarian policy cleared the way for capitalist development and promoted the establishment of bourgeois production relations in agriculture.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries displayed a complete lack of understanding the social nature of the development of society and the laws of the class struggle. They admitted that society consisted of unequal classes: those who possessed property and those who did not; that these two classes were locked in constant struggle; that this was a struggle between two opposing camps: the exploiters and the exploited, between the bourgeoisie and the working people. All the propertied sections of the population belonged to the camp of the bourgeoisie, while all the propertyless sections—workers, peasants and intellectuals—to the camp of the working people.

Not only was their unscientific approach to the character and definition of classes contrary to reality, but it also limited the role of the working class as vanguard and obstructed it in its mission of liberation. Such a policy was extremely harmful to both the working class and the peasantry, in whose interests the Socialist-Revolutionaries had sworn to fight. History has provided sufficient evidence of the peasantry's inability to win without the working class to organise and guide it. At best, it rises up in a mass peasant revolt.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Collection of the Programmes of Political Parties in Russia. Democratic Parties*, p. 42.

How did the Socialist-Revolutionaries intend to solve the agrarian question? Their agrarian programme was adopted at the party's First Congress (end of December 1905-beginning of January 1906). Socialisation of land on the basis of equal use was its chief objective in its programme, which read: "On solving the question of regulating land relations, the Socialist-Revolutionary Party is prepared to rely, in the interest of socialism and the struggle against the bourgeois property principles, upon communal and labour ideas, traditions and the way of life of the Russian peasants, and, especially, on the dissemination among them of the idea that the land belongs to no one and that only toil gives one the right to till it."<sup>1</sup>

The discussion of the programme was drawn out, because many delegates failed to understand what socialisation of land stood for. Nevertheless, the draft agrarian programme was adopted by the absolute majority. The congress decided to propagandise its agrarian programme far and wide among the peasantry and instructed its local branches to interpret the party's main thesis that "the land belongs to no one, is national property and should be distributed among those who work".

(In order to gain influence among the peasants, the congress formed a special body, the Peasant Union of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, which carried out large-scale agitation and published a host of leaflets for peasants. These leaflets, usually written according to a single pattern, carried the following information: "The land belongs to no one; it should be as free as the air and the sun; it cannot be owned privately; it should be national property and the right to it should be granted on equal terms and only to those who till it, and only in such quantity as can be tilled by them."

A campaign was launched to organise local peasant meetings, at which peasant communes resolved to join the Peasant Union of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. A review of many dozens of such resolutions shows that they were a serious warning to the ruling classes.

Following is the resolution of the peasants of Skorodny Village, Sudzhan Uyezd, Kursk Gubernia dated 7 August 1905. The peasants demanded that: (a) all peasants with little or no land must be given land out of the state, privately-owned and monastery estates; (b) redemption payments must be abolished; direct and in-

<sup>1</sup> Collection of the Programmes of Political Parties in Russia. Democratic Parties, pp. 45-46.

direct taxes must be collected according to income, and must also be levied upon civil servants and other employees; (c) peasants must be given equal rights with other estates; elected courts of law must be established; the individual and his home must be inviolable, and local authorities must be prohibited to fine or arrest without a court decision.

Similar demands may be found in most of the resolutions of peasant meetings.

In a number of resolutions the peasants warned the government that if their demands were not satisfied, they would carry them out by themselves.

These resolutions were only the first sign of the awakening class-consciousness of the peasants who still naively believed that the government would heed their needs. Communes and individual peasants sent thousands of such resolutions and demands to the government, all of which were left unanswered, so that the situation in the countryside remained unchanged. Still, the leaflets distributed by the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the peasant meetings they called had an important revolutionising effect upon the mass of peasants.

One of the statements of the Tambov gentry proves the importance of this party's influence on the peasantry: "daring in concept and strong in energy, the Socialist-Revolutionary Party ... carried out a number of terrorist actions in Russia.... The Revolutionaries have flooded Russia with hundreds of thousands of copies of their newspapers and revolutionary leaflets, providing the peasantry with tempting manifestos calling for the free allotment of land, forcefully alienated from landowners, to peasants."<sup>1</sup>

Peasant organisations were under a strong influence of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. It should be noted that before the Socialist-Revolutionaries formed their narrow partisan Peasant Union, there had already been a wide network of peasant unions, especially in the Central Black-Earth Belt and Volga area. Though these unions were non-party organisations, they were strongly influenced by the Socialist-Revolutionaries' ideology, who assisted in convening of the Constituent Congress of the Peasant Union in Moscow in the summer of 1905.

Having discussed the agrarian question, the congress took the following decision: private ownership of land should be abolished; monastery, church, appanage, Cabinet and state land should be

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<sup>1</sup> *The Agrarian Question in the Council of Ministers (1906)*, p. 95.

taken over without payment; privately-owned estates should be alienated, partly for payment and partly without. The congress also called for the establishment of gubernia, uyezd, volost and village Peasant Union committees.

V. I. Lenin enthusiastically hailed the peasant congress. In his article "The Proletariat and the Peasantry", he wrote: "Let us, then, send our warm greetings to the Peasant Union, which has decided to stand together and fight staunchly, selflessly and unswervingly for full freedom and for all the land. These peasants are true democrats. We must explain to them patiently and steadily where their views on the tasks of democracy and socialism are wrong, regarding them as allies with whom we are united by the great common struggle. These peasants are truly revolutionary democrats with whom we must and shall carry on the fight for the complete victory of the present revolution."<sup>1</sup>

The decisions of the congress stimulated the agrarian movement and the emergence of new peasant organisations. The First Congress of Peasant Union Delegates was held in November 1905. The overall political situation made for a more revolutionary approach in the decisions of the congress as compared to the summer Constituent Congress. The congress sent greetings to the rebellious peasants of Saratov Gubernia describing them as "vanguard fighters for the people's freedom". The delegates said that the "patience of the peasants had run out" and threatened the government with "a mass popular uprising".

The Second Congress of Peasant Union Delegates took place in March 1906 in Moscow. This culminated the Union's activities, for government repressions compelled the peasant unions first to go underground and later to break up completely. The terrorist activities of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, which were extremely detrimental to the peasant organisations as they provoked government repression, were mainly to blame for this. The breaking up of the peasant unions was a serious blow to the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and affected its ideological and organisational integrity.

The "Left" wing, which was the first to break away from the party, formed the independent Maximalist Party, whose chief demand was socialisation not only of the land but also of the factories and, in fact, of the entire national economy. The party was small and no threat to the Socialist-Revolutionaries, but soon

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Proletariat and the Peasantry", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, Moscow, 1962, p. 43.

a new party, the *Popular Socialist Party*, which can be regarded as the "Right" wing, branched off from it. This party was much larger than the Maximalist Party. It opposed terrorism in political struggle and demanded the nationalisation of all land, which was subject to repurchasing. However, the Popular Socialist Party had nothing to do with Marxism, taking its position at the opposite wing of the Russian Social-Democracy. It proclaimed its intention to defend the interest of the working masses as a whole, not of any one class, and to take support from the power and will of the entire people, not from the dictatorship of any one class.

The *agrarian section* of the party's programme read: "(a) the party considers it necessary to work for the nationalisation of the land, i. e. for turning it into national (state) property and distributing it among those who till it. The nationalisation of allotted peasant land and privately-owned land tilled by the owners themselves should be carried out through a system of measures which would ensure, on the one hand, that the land is used by those who work it and, on the other, that this land is gradually transformed into national property; other land (state, appanage, Cabinet, church, monastery, privately-owned, etc.) and also mineral resources and water should be nationalised immediately. The Land Fund, except land of state importance, is to be supervised by the local authorities. All citizens may use free land, with local population and peasantry having priority in receiving allotted land. A special tax should be imposed on the best land in order to equalise land of varying value. If the land is returned to the Fund, unused land improvements must be compensated.

"(b) The Party will support, at the same time, the state and Zemstvo policy directed to development of the labour and, particularly, the co-operative and communal systems in agriculture."

The Popular Socialists held a position close to the Trudoviks, a parliamentary peasant group in the First Duma which later formed the Party of Trudoviks. The Socialist-Revolutionary Party had boycotted the First Duma and was not therefore represented in it. Most of the peasant deputies elected to the First Duma, who had come out against the boycott, joined the Trudovik group, which proclaimed itself the defender of peasant interests.

The Party of Trudoviks stood for the compulsory alienation of land from big landowners, called for establishing a "popular land fund" providing land to all who needed it and as much as they could till it, and also assumed, as did the Popular Socialists, that the state should pay a compensation for alienated land. The Party of Trudoviks was against any universal socialisation of land and



against individual terrorism as a means of political struggle; as to the nationalisation of land, though this item was not included in the party's programme, it was, in fact, supported by its leaders.

Following is the main section of the party's agrarian programme: "As to the land question, the Party of Trudoviks maintains a point of view which has long since become a pressing one among the masses: land should be given only to those who work it and only in a quantity that can be tilled by each person. This opinion, shared by all the toiling masses of Central Russia and the remote regions as well, was the basis of the Trudoviks' agrarian programme. The group admitted, as it did during the session of the Duma, that the correct application of this approach would improve the land legislation in Russia and establish rules under which all the land, mineral resources and water would belong to the people and would be used equally."<sup>1</sup>

The appearance of numerous petty-bourgeois parties on the political scene was of great importance, for while reflecting the multiform nature of agrarian relations and the social heterogeneity of the Russian peasantry, they symbolised the higher organisational level of the peasant movement. These parties helped to awaken the peasants' political consciousness and, undoubtedly, presented a serious threat to the monarchy and the system of landed estates. Lenin commended the revolutionary-democratic orientation of the Narodnik agrarian programmes, especially during the first Russian revolution. Their revolutionary petty-bourgeois democratism, he said, "served as the banner of the most determined struggle against the old, feudal Russia".<sup>2</sup>

At the same time Lenin noted that not one of the Narodnik parties could produce a valid political programme for the peasantry in its struggle for political, economic and ideological emancipation. "The mistake all the Narodniks make is that by confining themselves to the narrow outlook of the small husbandman, they fail to perceive the bourgeois nature of the social relations into which the peasants enter on coming out of the fetters of serfdom. They convert the 'labour principle' of petty-bourgeois agriculture and 'equalisation', which are their slogans for breaking up the feudal latifundia, into something absolute, self-sufficing, into something implying a special, non-bourgeois order."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Collection of the Programmes of Political Parties in Russia. Democratic Parties*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 236-37.

## 6. THE LENINIST COURSE ON JOINING THE PEASANT MOVEMENT WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING CLASS

At the time of the first Russian revolution the RSDLP was split into two warring factions: the revolutionary-Marxist (Bolsheviks-Leninists) and the reformist-opportunist (Mensheviks-Plekhanovites). There was a deep gulf between these two factions, which were actually two independent political parties, for they differed over practically all ideological, organisational and tactical issues. The existing differences were now aggravated by a sharp divergence of views on the agrarian and peasant question. This difference had been there before, when the first agrarian programme was being drawn up, but it had never been so deep.

The swift change in the situation required the workers' party to draw up a new agrarian programme at once, meeting the urgent needs of the revolutionary peasants' struggle. Both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks admitted the need for a new agrarian programme and openly voiced their disapproval of the first agrarian programme. A wide campaign for revising the programme was launched by both parties. In the course of the campaign the conflicting views on and approaches to the agrarian question came into bold relief.

*In the beginning of the first Russian revolution Lenin stressed the political aspect of the agrarian question, because the overthrow of the landowner-monarchist system was not only an indispensable condition for solving that question, but also an inevitable stage in the struggle of the proletariat for power.* It should be noted that the peasantry, which comprised four-fifths of Russia's population, could be relied on in its majority to support the proletariat in a revolution against the landowners and their economic and political supremacy.

This prompted Lenin to analyse in detail the nature of a peasant revolution as one of the types of a bourgeois revolution and to give a new definition of its nature and development. Lenin was certain that a complete and decisive victory of the proletariat in a bourgeois-democratic revolution was impossible without a peasant revolution. In the same way the peasants' struggle, if lacking the revolutionary initiative and guidance of the proletariat, would inevitably end in a victory for the bourgeoisie, as it had happened in all similar cases in the West. Lenin often noted that revolutions in the 20th century could not be measured with the old yardstick:

"Whereas in sixteenth-century Germany, seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century France the peasantry could be put in the front rank, in the twentieth-century Russia the order must decidedly be reversed, since without the initiative and guidance of the proletariat the peasantry counts for nothing."<sup>1</sup>

In view of the new historical conditions, Lenin set the party two main political tasks: first, to promote the spread of the revolutionary-democratic peasant movement and merge it with the struggle of the working class; second, to work for the continual development of the revolutionary process, to secure the complete victory of the people in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and to transform it into a socialist revolution.

Lenin not only based his approach on the existing situation and the correlation of class forces in the country, but also took into account Marx's directions on combining proletarian revolution with a peasant war, and a revolutionary-democratic overturn with a socialist revolution. In order to impart a more organised and balanced nature to the development of the peasant revolution, Lenin defined the organisational forms by which the peasant masses might be united with the proletariat.

Lenin considered the organisation of peasant committees for the immediate seizure of landed estates and the establishment of revolutionary self-government locally to be one of the main such forms. In 1903, when drawing up the first agrarian programme, which demanded only the return of plots to peasants, Lenin proposed that such committees be organised and given substantial revolutionary powers. In debating with the Menshevik Maslov, Lenin, wrote in the summer of 1903: "he [Maslov.-S.T.] sees a contradiction in the fact that we demand abolition of the social-estates and the establishment of peasant, i.e., social-estate, committees. In fact, the contradiction is only a seeming one: the abolition of the social-estates requires a 'dictatorship' of the lowest, oppressed social-estate, just as the abolition of classes in general, including the class of proletarians, requires the dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>2</sup>

Now, in the course of the revolution, when the peasant committees were faced with a more radical task—to confiscate landed

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Assessment of the Russian Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, Moscow, 1963, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Reply to Criticism of Our Draft Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 440.

estates and nationalise all land, Lenin came out for further increasing the powers of peasant committees. He wrote: "Translated into simple language, peasant committees mean calling upon the peasants to set to work immediately and directly to settle accounts with the government officials and the landlords in the most drastic manner. Peasant committees mean calling upon the people who are being oppressed by the survivals of serfdom and the police regime to eradicate these survivals 'in a plebeian manner', as Marx put it."<sup>1</sup>

*Another revolutionary means uniting the peasantry, as Lenin saw it, was to organise the village proletariat into special bodies and groups within the peasant committees so as to provide them with a more distinct class orientation.* Dealing with the role of the peasantry in a revolution, Lenin was always aware of its specific social features. The stratified make-up of the peasantry made it "unstable, compelling the proletariat to rally in a strictly class party".<sup>2</sup>

Lenin held, however, that "the instability of the peasantry differs radically from that of the bourgeoisie, for at present the peasantry is interested not so much in the absolute preservation of private property as in the confiscation of the landed estates, one of the principal forms of private property. Without thereby becoming socialist, or ceasing to be petty-bourgeois, the peasantry is capable of becoming a wholehearted and most radical adherent of the democratic revolution."<sup>3</sup>

Hence, the Bolshevik Party (even in face of the impending socialist revolution) supported the bourgeois-democratic movement among the peasantry, which was out to take over landed estates. The Bolsheviks even allowed for the division of landed estates among small producers, being convinced that, guided by the proletariat, "the peasantry will inevitably become ... a bulwark of the revolution and the republic, for only a completely victorious revolution can give the peasantry *everything* in the sphere of agrarian reforms—*everything* that the peasants desire, dream of, and truly need".<sup>4</sup>

\* 1 V. I. Lenin, "The Unity Congress of the RSDLP. Speech in Reply to the Debate on the Agrarian Question", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, Moscow, 1962, p. 281.

2 V. I. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, Moscow, 1965, p. 98.

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*

All the same, the Bolsheviks were aware that the peasantry as a whole would follow the proletariat only up to the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and no farther. "We stand by the peasant movement to the end; but we have to remember that it is the movement of another class, *not the one* which can and will bring about the socialist revolution."<sup>1</sup> In the course of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the Marxist party was to separate the proletarian elements among the peasantry, organise them separately, prepare them for independent revolutionary action and, together with the urban proletariat, accomplish a socialist revolution. Only the proletariat "can be relied on to march on to the end, for it goes far beyond the democratic revolution".<sup>2</sup>

Lenin considered it indispensable for the revolutionary peasantry to be represented on the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which would be formed after the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and termed this the third form of uniting the peasants and the proletariat. Lenin regarded this government as a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry and developed this view in his articles published in the newspaper *Vperyod*, at the Third Bolshevik Congress, in his famous work *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* and in other works.

The Third Bolshevik Congress (April 1905) fully supported Lenin's political platform. It noted that "the growing peasant movement, though spontaneous and politically naïve, inevitably turns against the existing order and against the survivals of serfdom in general", and came out for "the most energetic support of all revolutionary peasant actions that may improve the lot of the peasants, not short of the confiscation of landowners', state, church, monastery and appanage land". The congress requested to consider as a vital necessity "the immediate organisation of revolutionary peasant committees aimed at carrying out all the revolutionary-democratic reforms to release the peasantry from the police and bureaucratic and landowners' yoke".

Furthermore, "in order to disorganise the autocracy and maintain the revolutionary pressure upon it" the congress proposed that "the peasantry and village proletariat be called upon to participate in all kinds of political demonstrations and collective re-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, p. 98.

fusals of paying levies and taxes, of serving in the army and of carrying out government decisions and orders". While supporting the peasant movement as a whole, the congress stressed the "necessity for forming independent organisations of the village proletariat, uniting it with the city proletariat under the guidance of the Social-Democratic Party and including its representatives in the peasant committees".<sup>1</sup>

Lenin suggested establishing, under favourable conditions, a Provisional Revolutionary Government, and substantiated the necessity of including the Social-Democrats in it. This was supported by the congress. Its resolution read: "To launch a resolute struggle against any counter-revolutionary attempts and to uphold the independent interests of the working class, the participation of the representatives of our party in the Provisional Revolutionary Government is possible, depending on the correlation of forces and other factors which cannot be precisely defined beforehand."<sup>2</sup>

The Mensheviks, headed by Plekhanov, most fiercely opposed Lenin's new tactics. The All-Russia Menshevik Conference which took place simultaneously with the congress, adopted decisions that revealed the basic differences between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks on all major issues of the Russian revolution. The Mensheviks were opposed to Lenin's thesis on the Provisional Revolutionary Government and to the participation in the government of Social-Democrats. They made the following arguments: [First] the Russian revolution should develop gradually, step by step, as did the 18th-century French bourgeois revolution; the Mensheviks claimed that Marx had also adhered to these tactics during the 1848 Revolution in Germany, when he believed that power would first go to the bourgeois democrats and then, after it would have discredited itself, to the proletariat. Then, having "corrected" Marx, the Mensheviks tried to prove that the Leninists, who would follow a course of turning the revolution into a socialist one and would establish a worker-peasant dictatorship, would thereby isolate these two forces from "the progressive bourgeoisie", which would inevitably lead to the defeat of the revolution and the victory of the reactionary forces. [Second] the Social-Democrats, after coming to power and establishing a worker-peasant dictatorship, would be compelled to

<sup>1</sup> KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh syezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK. 1898-1970 (CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions of Its Congresses, Conferences and CC Plenary Meetings, 1898-1970) (further - CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions...), Vol. 1, Moscow, 1970, pp. 116, 117 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> ibid., p. 114.

establish socialism, which, they alleged, was Utopia, saying that backward, petty-bourgeois, peasant Russia was not yet ready for this. That is why, the Mensheviks said, following such a course would doom the revolution, discredit Marx's theory and Social-Democrats. The Mensheviks based these assertions on a quotation from Engels' work, *The Peasant War in Germany*, where he speaks of the risk faced by a party that would try to gain power before the necessary conditions were established.

And, [third], the Mensheviks claimed that since the Russian revolution was a bourgeois one, the Social-Democrats should, as a matter of principle, abstain from participation in any workers' and peasants' government, retaining their position as the extreme Left opposition and applying revolutionary pressure upon the existing powers from "below" only. The Mensheviks rejected Lenin's demand that the Social-Democrats participate in the Provisional Revolutionary Government and tried to prove that this amounted to Blanquism, leading Social-Democrats away from the people.

Lenin criticised these revisionist arguments of the Mensheviks. He said there were only two possibilities: either the revolution culminates in a deal between the bourgeoisie and the autocracy and landowners, or it gains a complete victory. In the former instance it might result in some half-baked bourgeois-monarchist constitution and, in the latter, bring to power the proletariat and peasantry, who would be obliged by the existing conditions to exercise a dictatorship to do away with the united resistance of the bourgeoisie, the landowners and the tsarist bureaucracy.

By referring to Marx's statement on the Communists' tactics in 1848, the Mensheviks betrayed incomprehension of the creative spirit of Marxism and of the new conditions under which the Russian revolution was developing. One should remember that at the time the German Communists were not strong enough to keep power in the hands of the proletariat. They were poorly organised, while the bourgeois democrats were better prepared and organised. Marx proceeded from the existing correlation of class forces when recommending that the German Communists concentrate their efforts on uniting and organising the proletariat, while remaining, during a period of the revolution, within the bounds of the extreme Left opposition in relation to the bourgeois democrats.

Quite a different situation had come about during the first Russian revolution. The liberal democrats were scattered and weak, while the Social-Democrats were the strongest and the best organised force which had a great influence on the proletariat and

the other social forces of Russia. The class bounds were very clearly defined. In these conditions a decisive victory of the revolution would bring to power only a workers' party and the revolutionary peasantry.

As for the Menshevik concept that Social-Democrats should, as a matter of principle, confine themselves to the role of a Left opposition and thus exert revolutionary pressure only "from below", this was a result of the long period of political reaction in Europe which had come to an end. Under these new conditions in Russia, the revolutionary parties were to learn to exert pressure upon the ruling classes not only "from below", but also "from above", clearing the way, step by step, for a complete victory of the revolutionary masses.

"In the final analysis force alone settles the great problems of political liberty and the class struggle, and it is our business to prepare and organise this force and to employ it actively, not only for defence but also for attack. The long reign of political reaction in Europe, which has lasted almost uninterruptedly since the days of the Paris Commune, has made us too greatly accustomed to the idea that action can proceed only 'from below', has too greatly inured us to seeing only defensive struggles. We have now undoubtedly entered a new era—a period of political upheavals and revolutions has begun. In a period such as that which Russia is now passing through, it is impermissible to confine ourselves to old, stereotyped formulas. We must propagate the idea of action from above, must prepare for the most energetic, offensive action, and must study the conditions for and forms of such action."<sup>1</sup>

Over the question of revolutionary tactics Lenin fought uncompromisingly against the Mensheviks of the "Right" headed by Plekhanov, on the one hand, and against the Mensheviks of the "Left" represented by Trotsky and his supporters, on the other. Both these anti-Marxist trends reposed on a mistaken view of the nature of the revolution and its driving forces, and of the important role of the peasantry in the political life of Russia—a result of a lack of knowledge of the new economic processes taking place in the villages. The Mensheviks-Plekhanovites and Mensheviks-Trotskyites, while proceeding from the same principles, came to quite contrary conclusions. The Plekhanovites did not believe in the victory of a bourgeois-democratic revolution and, therefore, rejected the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, pp. 30-31.



whereas Trotsky and his followers regarded such a revolution as a socialist revolution that would establish a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Trotsky disregarded the necessity of a revolutionary-democratic overturn and corresponding changes, and asserted that the time had come to eliminate the distinction between a bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolution, between the minimum and maximum programmes. Using "Left" rhetoric as a cover, Trotsky insisted that the proletariat should be isolated from all political trends, meaning by this that it should, chiefly, be isolated from the peasantry. This was the basis for his absolutely adventurist slogan: "Without a tsar, and workers' government".

Though Trotsky acknowledged the possibility of forming a Provisional Revolutionary Government, he was against having peasant representatives in it. He, like Parvus, the leader of the German Social-Democrats, said that "a revolutionary provisional government in Russia will be a government of workers' democracy" and that "if the Social-Democrats head the revolutionary movement of the Russian proletariat, the government will be Social-Democratic", and that the Social-Democratic provisional government will be a "monolithic government with a Social-Democratic majority". In short, the motto of the "Left" Mensheviks was "to be more revolutionary than anybody else".

Lenin resolutely rejected the destructive, adventurist policy of the Trotskyites. In his article "Social-Democracy and the Provisional Revolutionary Government", Lenin pointed out that the Trotskyite rhetoric concealed a dangerous policy that would split the alliance of the working class and the peasantry, a policy that disorganises the revolutionary forces and would, in the end, result in the defeat of the revolution. Lenin noted that even if the revolution could immediately develop from a bourgeois-democratic into a socialist revolution, the Bolshevik Party ought not to be in any haste to call for a purely workers' government.

The article, "The Paris Commune and the Tasks of the Democratic Dictatorship", edited by Lenin and published in the newspaper *Proletary* of 17(4) July 1905, said that although Engels had called the Commune a dictatorship of the proletariat, the "politically conscious (but only more or less conscious) proletariat, i.e. the members of the International, was in the minority in the government of the Commune; the majority of the government consisted of representatives of the petty-bourgeois democracy".

The gist of the matter is that Trotsky, who like all the Mensheviks, underestimated the revolutionary role of the peasantry, did

not believe that the revolution could win in Russia, and made its result conditional on a socialist revolution in the West. Trotsky held that a revolution in Russia was necessary only to provoke socialist revolutions in Western countries, without which, he alleged, the Russian revolution would be irrelevant. He had no faith in the revolutionary strength of the working class and peasantry of Russia and saw the revolution in Russia as a casual event on the international scene isolated from the existing conditions and forces that were capable of achieving such a revolution.

Naturally, Lenin also hoped for a socialist revolution in the West that would give internationalist support to the Russian revolution and help it to consolidate its victory. But he held that Russia with its mighty revolutionary proletariat and peasantry, did not need to base its political and economic programme solely on the support and aid of other nations, and should count on its own potential and resources.

In commenting on the decision of the Third Bolshevik Congress and those of the All-Russia Menshevik Conference, which took place at the same time, in his *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, Lenin theoretically proved the continuity of a revolution and its inevitable evolution from a bourgeois-democratic to a socialist revolution. On the basis of this conclusion, Lenin clearly defined the new revolutionary tactics of the proletariat and its vanguard, the Bolshevik Party, in relation to the peasantry both during a bourgeois-democratic revolution and during its development into a socialist revolution.

*"The proletariat must carry the democratic revolution to completion, allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush the autocracy's resistance by force and paralyse the bourgeoisie's instability. The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, allying to itself the mass of semi-proletarian elements of the population, so as to crush the bourgeoisie's resistance by force and paralyse the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. Such are the tasks of the proletariat."*<sup>1</sup>

Having determined the new revolutionary tactics of the proletariat in relation to the peasantry, Lenin could not confine himself to merely introducing specific amendments in the agrarian programme adopted by the Second Congress. He made a basic revision of the programme, giving priority to the immediate confiscation of landed estates by the peasant committees and, after the complete victory of the revolution, the nationalisation of all the land.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, p. 100.

## CHAPTER V

# LENIN'S SECOND AGRARIAN PROGRAMME OF THE RSDLP FOR A BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONS

## 1. THE PRESSING NEED TO REVISE THE FIRST AGRARIAN PROGRAMME

At all stages of the revolution, Lenin invariably linked the agrarian programme with the class struggle of the proletariat and its revolutionary-democratic and socialist demands, which stemmed from the existing political situation and the scope of the oppressed classes' liberation movement. He never regarded the agrarian problem as something self-contained and standing apart from the class interests of the proletariat. He always studied the mood of the peasantry, taking its economic and political interests into consideration.

The first agrarian programme appeared at a time when capitalism was just establishing itself, both in urban and rural Russia. It was a time of deep socio-economic changes among the largest section of Russia's population, the peasantry which, under the influence of capitalist development, had broken up into different social groups. This process intensified class antagonisms in villages. At the same time, there was a complete lack of revolutionary spirit. It was quite difficult, under such conditions, to determine the socio-economic nature of development and the alignment of class forces in the countryside. All this, naturally, influenced the first agrarian programme of the RSDLP.

The second agrarian programme was drawn up under quite different historical conditions. The rapid development of capitalism gave way to a severe economic crisis, which gripped all the capitalist countries, including Russia. It was the *first crisis of the era of imperialism*, which most painfully revealed all the contradictions of the capitalist system. For Russia this crisis was catastrophic, for it was accompanied by a political crisis that shook the monarchist state to its very foundations and gave rise to a strong revolutionary movement. The stormy revolutionary actions of the proletariat

spread to the villages, bringing about a mass peasant movement. In the course of this movement the state of the rural economy, the alignment of class forces, and the form and direction of the peasants' revolutionary struggle became clear.

The developing revolution placed many vital questions in a new light, including the agrarian and peasant question. At the same time, it revealed major defects and mistakes in the first agrarian programme of the RSDLP, which was unsuited to the new conditions. In analysing the weak points of the agrarian programme, Lenin indicated three erroneous clauses that had to be immediately corrected in the interests of the development of the revolution and the full utilisation of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry as an active ally of the working class.

The first mistake was overestimation of the degree of capitalist development in agriculture. Lenin wrote that "while we correctly defined the *trend* of development, we did not correctly define the *moment* of that development. We assumed that the elements of capitalist agriculture had already taken full shape in Russia, both in landlord farming (minus the cut-off lands and their conditions of bondage—hence the demand that the cut-off lands be returned to the peasants) and in peasant farming, which seemed to have given rise to a strong peasant bourgeoisie and therefore to be incapable of bringing about a 'peasant agrarian revolution'. The erroneous programme was not the result of 'fear' of the peasant agrarian revolution, but of an over-estimation of the degree of capitalist development in Russian agriculture. The survivals of serfdom appeared to us then to be a minor detail, whereas capitalist agriculture on the peasant allotments and on the landlords' estates seemed to be quite mature and well-established.

"The revolution has exposed that mistake, it has confirmed the trend of development as we had defined it."<sup>1</sup>

The second mistake resulted from the fact that the agrarian programme lacked a full evaluation of the class stratification of the countryside, thus making it impossible to foresee the possible scope of the agrarian movement. It should be noted that this was influenced in part by the period of the 1890s, when it was quite difficult not only to determine the degree of development of the agrarian movement, but also its class orientation. "No one could say in advance with certainty to what extent disintegration among the peasantry has progressed as a result of the partial transition of

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, pp. 291-92.

the landlords from the labour-service system to wage-labour. No one could estimate how large was the stratum of agricultural labourers which had arisen after the Reform of 1861 and to what extent their interests had become separated from those of the ruined peasant masses."<sup>1</sup>

At the time Lenin considered it urgent to include in the agrarian programme demands that would inspire the peasantry to mass revolutionary struggle and ally it with the revolutionary struggle of the working class. Returning cut-off land—the plots taken from the peasants by the landowners during the 1861 Reform could serve as such an incentive. This demand obviously reflected the hopes and interests of the peasants. The post-Reform period proved that in spite of a revolutionary lull in the villages the peasants could not put up with being robbed by the landowners.

This demand ensured, on the one hand, a revolutionary movement aimed at abolishing the survivals of serfdom and, on the other, the development of a class struggle in the villages. In this respect the programme's clause on returning cut-off land was of definite importance. However, Lenin had pointed out more than once that it was not enough to limit the agrarian programme to this one demand. Actually, the programme charted only a half-way course.

In speaking of the objective difficulties that faced the early Marxists in drawing up an agrarian programme, Lenin wrote: "Without the experience of a mass—indeed more than that—of a nationwide peasant movement, the programme of the Social-Democratic Labour Party could not become concrete; for it would have been too difficult, if not impossible, on the basis of theoretical reasoning, to define the degree to which capitalist disintegration had taken place among our peasantry, and to what extent the latter was capable of bringing about a revolutionary-democratic change."<sup>2</sup>

Only by the spring of 1905 there emerged a clear picture of the agrarian movement. The revolutionary struggle of the peasantry was best organised only in South-Western Russia and in the Baltic Area where there existed a developed system of capitalist ownership of land and a large army of farm labourers, and where political strikes and armed conflicts were taking place. In most of the other agricultural regions the peasant masses fought against the

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905–1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 256.

landowners by rioting and dividing up the landed estates. This movement was mostly spontaneous, unorganised, and directed chiefly at seizing and dividing up the landowners' land, cattle and implements.

It became evident that the demand for the return of cut-off land was a half-measure, for the peasant movement had advanced much farther than the first agrarian programme had assumed. Lenin examined the economic developments in the countryside and the experience of the peasant movement and demonstrated that the Russian Social-Democrats had been wrong, with respect to the historical prospects, to limit their first agrarian programme to just the return of the cut-off land.

The mass revolutionary movement in the villages in the first five years of the 20th century proved that the peasants wanted not only the cut-off land, but all land owned by the landowners. "Those who deny this," Lenin wrote, "cannot explain the present breadth and depth of the revolutionary peasant movement in Russia. Our mistake in putting forward the demand for the restitution of cut-off lands was that we did not sufficiently appraise the breadth and depth of the democratic, that is, the bourgeois-democratic movement among the peasantry. It would be unwise to persist in this mistake now that the revolution has taught us so much."<sup>1</sup>

The third mistake of the RSDLP's agrarian programme was that it was based on an approximate division of landed estates into those on which methods of serfdom prevailed and those on which capitalist methods were used. "Such a tentative distinction was quite fallacious," Lenin said, "because, in practice, the peasant mass movement could not be directed against particular categories of landlord estates, but only against landlordism in general."<sup>2</sup> Referring to world experience in agrarian movements, Lenin proved that under imperialism landed estates were closely tied to the capitalist ownership of land.

Even in the West European countries where there were many more landed estates run along capitalist lines, the peasants were to come out against landed estates as a whole, for only such a struggle could bring victory over all exploiters. Marxists did not advo-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 257.

cate abolition of large capitalist enterprises, which could become state centres of large-scale production after the victory of the proletariat. But they could not oppose the revolutionary seizure of land by the peasants on just these grounds.

Despite the moderate character of the first agrarian programme and the inadequacy of its revolutionary-democratic demands, Lenin was very careful in revising it. Until 1905 he maintained that the programme still corresponded to the main task of the moment: rallying the revolutionary forces of the proletariat and developing the class struggle in the countryside. Only in the spring of 1905, when the peasant movement had become a general movement, did he conclude that the agrarian programme needed revising, while warning, as before, against undue haste.

In his letter to the Third Bolshevik Congress, "On Our Agrarian Programme", Lenin wrote: "The Social-Democrats maintain ... that it is scarcely possible for the entire peasantry to go solid on any issue beyond the demand for the return of the cut-off lands, for when the limits of such an agrarian reform are exceeded, the antagonism between the rural proletariat and the 'enterprising muzhiks' will inevitably assert itself more sharply than ever. The Social-Democrats, of course, can have no objection to the insurgent muzhik's 'dealing the landlord the final blow' and to his taking *all* his land away from him, but they cannot embark on adventurism in a proletarian programme, they cannot let the class struggle against the property-owners be obscured by roseate prospects of such changes in the landowning system (even though these changes may be democratic) as would merely reshuffle the classes or categories of property-owners."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin considered it advisable, at first, to transfer the demands for returning the cut-off plots from the programme to the commentary to the programme, and put down in the programme that the RSDLP demanded, in the first place, "the formation of revolutionary peasant committees for the purpose of eliminating all remnants of the serf-owning system, transforming all rural relations in general along democratic lines, taking revolutionary measures to improve the lot of the peasantry, even to the extent of taking the land away from the landlords. Social-Democracy will back the peasantry in all its revolutionary-democratic undertakings, while at the same time defending the independent interests and the independent organisation of the rural proletariat."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On Our Agrarian Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, Moscow, 1965, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 248.

The Third Bolshevik Congress unanimously approved Lenin's wording. The further development of the peasant movement called for subsequent revolutionary agrarian demands which were adopted at the Tammerfors Conference (December 1905). At Lenin's proposal the conference decided to exclude from the programme the clause "on cut-off lands" and include instead more concrete agrarian demands: "the Party supports the revolutionary undertakings of the peasantry up to the confiscation of all state, church, monastery, appanage, Cabinet and private lands, seeing its main and constant task in the independent organisation of the rural proletariat and in explaining to it the uncompromising contradiction between its interests and the interests of the rural bourgeoisie, and in indicating the final aim of socialism."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin's final conclusion on the question appeared in the article "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party" (1906). Later, he developed it in *The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907*" (1907). The powerful surge of the peasant movement made clear the main trends of socio-economic development and the alignment of the class forces in the countryside, thus enabling Lenin with surprising accuracy to determine the future direction of the agrarian movement and to work out a new theory and tactics for the party on the agrarian question.

In analysing the decisions of the peasant congresses, Lenin came to the conclusion that the peasants, at least their most advanced representatives, had already come to demand the abolition of the private ownership of land and the nationalisation of all land. On this basis Lenin put forward a new thesis: "The only stand Social-Democrats can take on the agrarian question at the present time, when the issue is one of carrying the democratic revolution to its conclusion, is the following: against landlord ownership and for peasant ownership, if private ownership of land is to exist at all. Against private ownership of land and for nationalisation of the land in definite political circumstances."<sup>2</sup>

This shows Lenin's wisdom and perspicacity in drawing up the agrarian programme of the Bolshevik Party. He made a thorough study of statistical data on the rural economy and analysed the class stratification of the peasantry, the nature of the agrarian

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 1, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 181.



movement, its forms and trends, and arrived at the conclusion that the revolution in Russia would follow different laws than those prevailing in the West European countries.

## 2. THE THEORETICAL AND POLITICAL BASIS OF LENIN'S SECOND AGRARIAN PROGRAMME

Lenin's second agrarian programme, drawn up during the first Russian revolution, is a brilliant example of the creative development of the revolutionary theory of Marxism and of the skill with which it was applied under concrete historical conditions in Russia. It determined the means of solving the agrarian question in the interests of the working class and the labouring peasantry, both in a bourgeois-democratic and in a socialist revolution.

At the time this question was so complex and confusing that many professional Bolshevik revolutionaries failed to grasp its finer points. This explains to some degree the erroneous position adopted on the agrarian question by most Bolshevik delegates to the Fourth Congress of the RSDLP. However, it was not merely a matter of complexity. There were other reasons, chief among which was the evaluation given by many Russian Marxists to the Russian revolution. They were greatly influenced by the old, outdated dogmas of the so-called orthodox Marxists of the Western Social-Democratic parties.

Thus, even among the most devoted proletarian revolutionaries there were many who hoped that the Russian revolution would follow the Western pattern of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions. By automatically transplanting Western experience to Russia they strove to achieve a victorious bourgeois-democratic revolution, believing it to be the pinnacle of what the Russian proletariat could accomplish.

The task of further developing the revolution into a socialist revolution was relegated to the distant future, since, according to the plan worked out by the theoreticians of Western Social-Democratic parties, there was to be an obligatory interval, a more or less prolonged inter-revolutionary period, during which capitalism would entrench itself in all spheres of social and economic life, would completely take over the agricultural sphere and transform the peasantry into a proletariat. It was believed that a socialist revolution would take place only after the industrial and agricultural proletariat would become numerically predominant.

Lenin refuted the anti-scientific plans and dogmas of the Western Social-Democrats, revealing their obsolescence and unsuitability in the new conditions. By applying the dialectical method of Marxism he evolved and theoretically substantiated a new course of political strategy and party tactics applicable to the era of imperialism and to the concrete historical situation which then existed in Russia. Lenin analysed the experience of the Western bourgeois revolutions and proved that there was a tremendous difference between a bourgeois-democratic and a socialist revolution and that it would be a grave error to try to leap from the uncompleted first phase of the revolution to the second phase. Lenin severely criticised Trotsky for trying to make the Party follow such an adventurist policy by putting forward in 1905 the provocative slogan: "Without a tsar, and workers' government".

At the same time Lenin stressed that it was wrong to think there was an unsurmountable barrier between a bourgeois-democratic and a socialist revolution and that there was an obligatory long interval during which the necessary conditions for going over from the first, bourgeois-democratic phase to the second, socialist, phase would evolve. He never failed to correct the error of those Bolsheviks who defended the old, dogmatic positions.

True, the bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries followed this plan, but in an entirely different historical period when the proletariat was only taking shape as a class and had no experience of political or class struggle. As for the peasantry, which was a homogeneous class in the feudal society, it most often sided with the bourgeoisie. Naturally, under such conditions the working class was unable to head the bourgeois-democratic revolution and lead it to a socialist overturn. The gains of the past revolutions in the West fell to the bourgeoisie, which to this day refuses to part with them. Experience has shown that the Social-Democratic theory of "breaks" and "intervals" between revolutions is an ideological weapon whereby the bourgeoisie forces its way to power, using it against the working class and the labouring peasantry. Many facts in past and present history attest to this.

Lenin evaluated the prospects of the first Russian revolution from a new angle and came to the irrefutable conclusion that the bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions were two indivisible processes and that the bourgeoisie was interested in having an interval between them because it feared a complete victory of the revolutionary people. *The proletariat, however, stood for the continuity of revolution and for bringing it to a victorious end.* Besides, under the new historical conditions the proletariat pos-

essed enough strength, together with the peasantry, to follow up the bourgeois-democratic with a socialist revolution.

Thus, Lenin made a completely new appraisal of the Russian revolution and of its laws and direction. To understand the idea of his new agrarian programme one had to understand the new political strategy and tactics that he had developed in his works and from which there later evolved the harmonious and consistent theory of socialist revolution.

Later events proved that the differences among Bolsheviks on the agrarian question disappeared when they came to understand this theory. However, that took a whole decade. In 1917 the Party's April Conference unanimously adopted Lenin's agrarian programme, for it was evident that due to its specific conditions Russia was on a course leading from the bourgeois-democratic revolution to a socialist revolution, and that Lenin's predictions were coming true.

Lenin's agrarian programme was distinguished by its theoretical soundness and Marxist revolutionary spirit, calling on the peasant masses to take decisive action against the autocracy and the medieval feudal order. (The programme convincingly linked the idea of an agrarian overturn with a political overturn, with seizure of state power by the revolutionary people, the establishment of a democratic republic and the progress of the revolution to a complete socialist overturn.)

In working out the revolutionary tactics of his agrarian policy, Lenin relied on the international experience of the peasant movement and the Marxist analysis of the agrarian question in Russia in his brilliant theoretical works on the agrarian question. Touching on the economic side of the problem, he came to the conclusion that landed estates prevailed in Russia as before; the gentry possessed large areas of land and adhered rather to serf than the capitalist system of agriculture. This is clearly seen from the distribution of land and the method of its use.

Statistical data helped Lenin to establish that land suitable for cultivation in European Russia amounted to 280 million dessiatines. The six-sevenths of the arable land was owned by the two antagonistic classes: the gentry and the peasants. Their systems of landownership differed in that most of the privately-owned land belonged to the gentry while the allotted land belonged to the peasantry.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Question in Russia Towards the Close of the Nineteenth Century", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 72.

First, Lenin analysed the nature of private landownership, meaning not only the large landed estates of the gentry, but also the lesser peasant-landowners, i. e. prosperous peasants who had bought land. On the basis of statistical data, he came to the conclusion that in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, land was still concentrated as before, as in the medieval times, in the hands of the privileged gentry.

Small-scale ownership of land was practically non-existent, as can be seen from the following figures: six-sevenths of all landowners (619,000 out of 753,000) had only 6.5 million dessiatines, while 699 landowners had an average close to 30,000 dessiatines each. "If we take all properties over 500 dessiatines, we get 28,000 owners, possessing 62 million dessiatines, or an average of 2,227 dessiatines each. These 28,000 possess three-fourths of all the privately-owned land. Taken from the angle of the social-estates to which their owners belong, these enormous latifundia are mainly [more than 70 per cent] the property of the nobility."<sup>1</sup> "The medieval character of landlordism is very strikingly revealed by these data."<sup>2</sup>

Lenin goes on to deal with the distribution of allotted land in the possession of the communes: 12.25 million peasant households own 136.9 million dessiatines, the average being 11.1 dessiatines per household. However, the allotted land was also distributed unevenly: nearly half of it (64 million dessiatines) was owned by 2.1 million prosperous households, i. e. by one-sixth of the overall number, while ten million peasant households owned only 72.9 million dessiatines. That meant millions of peasant households "have been allotted paltry strips of land which can provide no livelihood, and on which one can only die of starvation".<sup>3</sup>

On the basis of his analysis of the private and allotted-communal ownership of land, Lenin came to the conclusion that the demarcation line of the class struggle lay between the landowners and the majority of the peasants. Here is what he said the struggle was about: "Ten million peasant households own 73,000,000 dessiatines of land, whereas 28,000 noble and upstart landlords own 62,000,000 dessiatines. Such is the main background of the arena

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Question in Russia Towards the Close of the Nineteenth Century", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 76.

on which the peasants struggle for the lands and develop

In his study of the socio-economic conditions of the Russian village Lenin established four groups of agricultural economies a mass of peasant farms crushed by the feudal landlord and directly interested in the expropriation of these landlord an expropriation from which they stand to gain directly more than anyone else 2 a small minority of middle peasants already possessing an approximately average amount of land sufficient to conduct farming in a profitable way 3 a small minority of wealthy peasants who are becoming transformed into a peasant bourgeoisie and who are connected by a number of intermediate links with farming conducted on capitalist farms 4 feudal fundia farms exceeding in dimensions the capitalist farms of the present period in Russia and deriving their revenues chiefly from the expropriation of the peasants by means of bondage and the labour-service (corvée) system 2

The quantitative difference and distribution of land were however on only one side of the agrarian question the second most obvious side was the fact that agriculture in Russia was of a half-serf not a capitalist nature This hampered the development and improvement of agriculture not only on landed estates but on peasant plots too The landlords did not introduce the large-scale capitalist system of agriculture on their vast estates but as a rule rented them out for short periods (yearly rent) to peasants Moreover the lease was largely on a metayage basis The money value was very high

A most advanced estates was tied with primitive implements belonging to peasants and the outdated three-field farming system still existed As a result both the peasants and landlords and were becoming exhausted and yielded very poor crops

The highest crops were produced on landlord estates on which new methods were being introduced and machines fertilisers etc were used However the number of such estates as compared with total land rented to peasants was negligible Even if they should be damaged in a peasant revolution this would not affect the great progress that lay in store for agriculture as a whole

Thus Lenin's revolutionary tactics were based on a strict scientific study of agriculture and socio-economic relations in Russia

There were two ways of solving the agrarian question under the

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V Lenin The Agrarian Programme of Social Democracy in the First Russian Revolution 1905-1907 *Collected Works* Vol 3 p 225  
- bold pp 225-26

existing conditions. Both inevitably led to the replacement of survivals of serfdom by capitalist relations. But they differed greatly. "The survivals of serfdom may fall away either as a result of the transformation of landlord economy or as a result of the abolition of the landlord latifundia, i. e., either by reform or by revolution. Bourgeois development may proceed by having big landlord economies at the head, which will gradually become more and more bourgeois and gradually substitute bourgeois for feudal methods of exploitation. It may also proceed by having small peasant economies at the head which in a revolutionary way, will remove the 'excrescence' of the feudal latifundia from the social organism and then freely develop without them along the path of capitalist economy." <sup>1</sup>

[The first way,] a prolonged and agonising one, was the "Prussian" way which combined capitalist development with many survivals of serfdom. [The second way,] a quick and resolute one, was the "American" way which swept out all survivals of serfdom and cleared the way for the development of a purely capitalist farming system. These two ways were followed as soon as the emancipation of peasants began. The Reform of 1861 followed the first way, as did the second, "Stolypin" reform.

Lenin studied the two possible types of agrarian evolution, and also showed the differentiation of class forces. The liberal bourgeoisie and the landowners, headed by the Cadets, were for the first way, whereas the peasantry and the proletariat, supported by the Narodnik parties and the Social-Democrats, were for the second way. Lenin said: "That line is determined by the interests of the two principal classes in Russian society which are fighting for the land, viz., the landlords and the peasantry. The Cadets stand for the preservation of landlordism and for a civilised, European, but landlord bourgeois evolution of agriculture. The Trudoviks (and the Social-Democratic workers' deputies), i. e. the representatives of the peasantry and the representatives of the proletariat, advocate a peasant bourgeois evolution of agriculture." <sup>2</sup>

Lenin appraised the agrarian programmes of all other parties from this point of view. The Mensheviks who tended to adopt the position of the Cadets, divided the programmes of the other parties on the following principle: agrarian programmes up to the Cadet Party ("the right") and agrarian programmes beginning

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 247.

with the Cadets ( the left ) Lenin rejected this division. He distinguished the agrarian programmes of all the other parties in accordance with the two types of development of capitalism in agriculture and showed that the demarcation line between the right and the left programmes lay not between the Octobrists and the Cadets as the Menshevik theoreticians thought but between the Cadets and the Trudoviks. Though Lenin criticised the Narodnik theories and programmes he pointed out the revolutionary-democratic essence saying that they do indeed constitute the ideological cloak of the peasants' struggle for and

Lenin consistently supported the American way which could take place only as a result of a bourgeois-democratic revolution that would end in the victory of the proletariat and the peasantry. His enemies tried to misrepresent Lenin's interpretation of the question stressing the victory of capitalism in agriculture and purposefully overlooking the main idea - the complete victory of the workers and peasants' revolution which would lead in the end to a socialist changeover in agriculture.

After clarifying the economic side of the agrarian question Lenin linked this scientific conclusion with the political tasks of the Party. In his well-known work *Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party* he wrote: "Our agrarian programme should consist of three main parts. First, the formulation of the most emphatic call for a revolutionary peasant onslaught upon and order; secondly, a precise definition of the next step the movement can and should take to consolidate the peasants' gains and to pass from the victory of democracy to direct proletarian struggle for socialism; third, an indication of the Party's proletarian class aims."<sup>2</sup>

In describing the principal issues of the new agrarian programme Lenin felt it was essential to present them as clear and simple suggestions which would serve as a guide to the proletariat and the peasantry in the revolution. He believed that these suggestions would be understood and would find a response among the revolutionary masses which would spur them to a decisive assault upon the autocracy.

The first suggestion was aimed at achieving complete victory in a peasant uprising without which the agrarian question could not be solved. The only organ that would rally the peasantry would be confiscation of landed estates by revolutionary peasant committees.

ibid p. 234

<sup>2</sup> V. Lenin, *Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 9-92.

tees, this being the only means of doing away with the medieval system of landownership. The Mensheviks' projects of "alienation" and "municipalisation", he said, are "a call for the peasantry to settle the question, not by means of insurrection but by a deal with the landlords, with the reactionary central authority. It is a call for a settlement of the question, not in a revolutionary but in a bureaucratic way, for even the most democratic regional and Zemstvo organisations are bound to be bureaucratic compared with revolutionary peasant committees."<sup>1</sup>

The second suggestion concerned the joint struggle of the proletariat and the peasantry to change the political and state system and to establish a democratic republic. If this were not achieved it would be impossible to retain the gains of the peasant uprising and further develop the revolution towards socialist gains. "We must say to the peasants: after taking the land, you should go further, otherwise you will be beaten and hurled back by the landlords and the big bourgeoisie. You cannot take the land and retain it without achieving new political gains, without striking another and ever stronger blow at private ownership of land in general.... And that means a republic and the complete sovereignty of the people. It means—if a republic is established—the nationalisation of all the land as the most that a bourgeois-democratic revolution can attain, as the natural and necessary step from the victory of bourgeois democracy to the beginning of the real struggle for socialism."<sup>2</sup>

The third suggestion urged the city and village proletariat to organise separately and to unite with the Marxist party in order to be ready to lead the revolution further, to the complete victory of a socialist revolution. Lenin placed special emphasis on the Party's adhering to its class policy, because the revolutionary peasant movement was incapable, due to its petty-bourgeois nature, of achieving a socialist revolution. More, under certain circumstances it was liable to turn against the socialist gains of the proletariat. "The nearer the peasant uprising is to victory, the more likely is the peasant proprietor to turn against the proletariat, the more necessary is it for the proletariat to have its independent organisation, and the more vigorously, perseveringly, resolutely and loudly should we call for the complete socialist revolution."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 190–91.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 191.



*Lenin's second agrarian programme, which was based on these three principal theses, differed greatly from the first agrarian programme in theoretical approach and political and socio-economic demands.* The basic idea underlying the new programme was that of continuing revolution, of transforming the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution. The political means for this was a government of worker-peasant dictatorship, while nationalisation of the implements and means of production, including nationalisation of land, was the economic means.

### 3. THE NATIONALISATION OF LAND AS THE PRINCIPAL POINT OF LENIN'S AGRARIAN PROGRAMME

The Party's scientific agrarian programme was greatly influenced by Marx's theory of absolute land rent, in which he proved that the backwardness of agriculture, the ruin and impoverishment of small landowners, resulted from monopolistic private ownership of land. Due to its prevalence in agriculture even in the most advanced capitalist countries there existed a parasitic class of landowners, who had nothing to do with production but received a special income—land rent—simply because of their right to own land. This parasitic class was an obstacle to free capital investment in agriculture and to the growth of the productive forces in agriculture.

Marx theoretically substantiated the necessity of nationalising the land as a progressive measure which would promote the development of the productive forces. At the same time, he made it clear that the nationalisation of land (i. e. turning private property of land into state property) could be achieved in any capitalist state.

Nationalisation of land means, first of all, abolition of absolute rent and of the parasitic class of landowners, making it possible to freely invest new capital in agriculture. Thus, agriculture becomes the same free sphere of investment for the capitalist as is industry. The abolition of absolute rent releases tremendous funds for raising the productivity of agriculture, something of interest to the capitalists who regard landowners "as a mere superfetation, a Sybarite excrescence, a parasite on capitalist production, the louse that sits upon him".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "Theories of Surplus-Value", Part II, Moscow, 1975, p. 328.

Nationalisation of land gives strong impetus to the development of capitalism in agriculture, for under capitalism it consolidates the supremacy of the bourgeoisie, which, nevertheless, never carried it through in any country. The Russian bourgeoisie, which came to power after the February revolution, refused pointblank to nationalise land. The question arises: why does even the most radical bourgeoisie withdraw its demand for the nationalisation of land, although this measure is a means of consolidating its supremacy?

[First] as the bourgeoisie evolved into a ruling class, it was moving increasingly to the positions of the old social estates, the gentry, princes and landowners, against whom it had fought originally as a revolutionary force. In contrast to the era of struggle against feudalism, in this new period, the era of imperialism, there was a fusing of financial capital with large landed estates. The bourgeoisie now strove to acquire land while landowners strove to participate in capitalist enterprises. As a result, the bourgeoisie withdrew the question of land nationalisation and united with the old social estates, forming an alliance with them against the working class and the labouring peasant masses.

[Second] even the most radical bourgeoisie withdrew its land nationalisation demand, fearing that the encroachment upon one type of property, in this case land, may serve as a precedent for encroachment upon other types of property: factories, mines, capital, etc. That is why the bourgeoisie came out in defence of landed estates, "since an attack on one form of property—a form of the private ownership of a condition of labour—might cast considerable doubts on the other form. Besides, the bourgeois has himself become an owner of land."<sup>1</sup>

[Third] in the course of time the working class grew strong and evolved into an independent political force opposed to the capitalist class. The antagonistic class contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat reached a point that the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the coming to power of the proletariat became inevitable. But the proletariat, naturally, would not stop on gaining power. It would inevitably use political power to abolish all exploitation and all exploiters. That is why, fearing its grave-digger, the proletariat, the bourgeoisie rejected all progressive measures, including nationalisation of land, in order not to lose its political and economic supremacy.

Fourth, the peasantry, which was the chief supporter of the

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "Theories of Surplus-Value", Part II, pp. 44-45.

bourgeoisie in its early revolutions, had also changed its class features. Drawn as it was into the sphere of capitalist economy, it became stratified and ceased being a homogeneous class, as it had been under feudalism. It was divided into a large army of agricultural labourers, a proletariat, at one pole and the agricultural bourgeoisie at the other. That is why "the interests of the peasants ... are no longer ... in accord with, but in opposition to the interests of the bourgeoisie, to capital. Hence the peasants find their natural ally and leader in the urban proletariat, whose task is the overthrow of the bourgeois order".<sup>1</sup>

Under these circumstances the poorest peasantry and the agricultural proletariat, joining the working class, fight for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and for a socialist revolution. Fearing the peasant masses, the bourgeoisie turns to the landowners, to the large landed proprietors, and completely rejects the nationalisation of land: it is aware that the abolition of private landownership strengthens the worker-peasant alliance and leads to the abolition of all private property in tools and means of production and to the downfall of the bourgeois regime.

In analysing the course of social development, Marx and Engels came to yet another conclusion: the nationalisation of land could not only be a measure promoting capitalism in agriculture but a mighty force in a socialist revolution as well. Marx and Engels criticised those bourgeois ideologists who believed that land nationalisation would establish peace between labour and capital and dampen the class struggle in the countryside, and presented the question of land nationalisation from a completely new angle, connecting it with the development of the class struggle in the villages and with the necessity of making the peasantry, an ally of the proletariat, a mighty reserve in the struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Lenin further developed Marx's land rent theory and the idea of land nationalisation which followed from it, and brilliantly applied it to the current conditions in Russia. He first put forward the demand for the nationalisation of land in his famous work *What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* and invariably included it in the Party's policy documents in the later stages of the revolutionary struggle. The question of land nationalisation was a special issue at the Fourth (Unity) RSDLP Congress.

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, p. 191.

In his works on the agrarian question Lenin directed devastating criticism at Menshevik theoreticians who had drifted to the positions of the bourgeois economists, and focussed his attention on the essence of Marx's agrarian theory, which gave an understanding of the reorganising role of land nationalisation. Answering the question of the real significance of land nationalisation for Russia, Lenin said that it was a pressing economic need for the development of the productive forces. He made it clear that the Mensheviks, who rejected land nationalisation, revealed their lack of knowledge of the essence of differential and absolute rent which Marx had distinguished so definitely.

*Differential rent* is a purely capitalist rent which originates in capitalist competition on limited areas of land, with farms operating in differing conditions. Differential rent is not connected with the private ownership of land: it may exist under conditions of private ownership of land or nationalised land, nor does it affect grain prices. If the land is privately owned the landowner receives this rent; if the land is nationalised, the state receives it. *Absolute rent* stems from monopolistic private ownership of land. It consolidates the highest profits and raises the price of agricultural produce. That is why nationalisation would help abolish this rent and reduce the price of agricultural produce by the sum of this rent.

Thus, nationalisation of large-scale landed estates would not in the least interfere with the capitalist nature of production; on the contrary, while doing away with monopolistic private ownership of land, it would clear the way for capitalism and free competition of investments in agriculture. With the nationalisation of small plots and allotted land the result is the same. Dealing with the essence of land nationalisation, Lenin stressed that its necessity stemmed from the economic relations of a given society and met the interests of the peasant masses. This was the reason why, during the first Russian revolution, the bulk of the peasantry (individual peasant and members of peasant communes) demanded not only abolition of landed estates but nationalisation of all land.

Lenin determined the economic essence of land nationalisation and revealed its political significance, which he connected with the victory of revolution in Russia. He pointed out that in Russia historical conditions had taken shape that made the proletariat leader in the revolution and the only class fully supporting the peasant demand to abolish the feudal system of landed estates. Hence, the struggle for the nationalisation of land meant also a struggle for the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants, and for creating the necessary conditions for the develop-

ment of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution.

The chief result of nationalisation was the abolition of private property in land, which was of great importance. Land nationalisation would have a tremendous economic and political effect, not only on a national scale, but internationally as well. "In any case, it would have tremendous material and moral significance. Material significance, in that nothing is capable of so thoroughly sweeping away the survivals of medievalism in Russia, of so thoroughly renovating the rural districts, which are in a state of Asiatic semi-decay, of so rapidly promoting agricultural progress, as nationalisation.... The moral significance of nationalisation in the revolutionary epoch is that the proletariat helps to strike a blow at 'one form of private property' which must inevitably have its repercussions all over the world."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin pointed out that land nationalisation carried out by the capitalist class could not of itself do away with exploitation. However, provided political power was in the hands of the proletariat, it was a powerful means of abolishing exploitation and exploiters, and the first step towards a new, socialist system. The aims of land nationalisation under capitalism differ radically from those pursued by the revolutionary power of the people. In the first instance capitalism and its system of oppression continue to exist, while in the second nationalisation as a transitional measure leads to the abolition of the exploiter classes and brings about a radical change in agriculture on a new, socialist basis.

The fact that in their struggle for land the peasants called for nationalisation was a strong argument in its favour. The Mensheviks insisted that if anyone tried to nationalise the allotted land, a Russian *Vendée* would erupt and the peasantry rise against the proletariat and the revolution. But at the sessions of all Dumas, with the Peasant Union, the Trudoviks and all the peasant deputies demanding nationalisation, the Mensheviks could see that their predictions were groundless.

The peasants were perfectly justified to demand land nationalisation. They understood the question far better than the Mensheviks. It was clear to them that nationalisation would not deprive them of their land and, on the contrary, would add to it through the confiscated estates. They knew there was no need to worry about their allotments, which tied them to medieval forms of land-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, pp. 324-25.

ownership. And Lenin wisely guessed the wishes of the peasants, who wanted the old land relations broken, boundaries abolished and all land mixed and put into a single land fund for re-distribution on a new socio-economic basis. Their wishes were justified. Most peasants received no rent; on the contrary, they were obliged to pay rent. Nationalisation would relieve them of the burdensome rent, increase their plots, and offer scope for free farming on liberated land.

The Mensheviks obscured this essence of the peasants' struggle for land and took a stance similar to that of the Cadets. The Narodnik parties, which supported nationalisation, were much closer to the Bolsheviks in this respect. Lenin pointed out that the mistake of the Narodnik parties was not in insisting on "equalised" use of land, but in believing that this was a "labour principle", in presenting small-scale and equalised land use as something new that would pave the way to the socialist order. Lenin consistently stressed that the labour principle and equalisation of land use were evidence of a backward petty-bourgeois socialism. But "in a vague form those principles *do* express something real and *progressive* at the present historical moment. Namely, they express the struggle for the break-up of the feudal latifundia."<sup>1</sup>

While showing the mistakes of the agrarian theories of the Narodnik parties, Lenin took into account their progressive role in the liberation struggle of the Russian peasantry. He denounced those Bolsheviks who saw the agrarian programmes of the Narodniks in an exclusively negative light and did not appreciate their attractiveness for the peasantry. "They criticise, and rightly criticise, the 'labour principle' and 'equalisation' as backward, reactionary petty-bourgeois *socialism*; but they forget that these theories express progressive, revolutionary petty-bourgeois *democracy*, that they serve as the banner of the most determined struggle against the old, feudal Russia."<sup>2</sup>

Nationalisation expressed the true interests and aspirations of the peasants who understood it subconsciously but did not know how to achieve it. While the Narodnik parties, supported by the peasantry, could not provide a correct answer, the Menshevik reformists deliberately led the peasants along a treacherous bourgeois road. The Bolsheviks alone had correctly defined the economic and political demands of the historical development and were

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 237.

able to provide the peasants with a programme leading to complete victory.

This goal could be achieved only through an alliance of the working class and the peasantry and through their unity in the struggle for their political and economic rights. This political unity was necessary so that the revolution could be carried out decisively and consistently by the workers and peasants with the least possible participation of various mediators and conciliators.

Lenin noted that the Marxist party had to make it clear to the peasants that if the agrarian revolution was to be accomplished they had to join the working class and act together with it under its guidance to bring the political revolution to victory. Without this there could be no dependable agrarian revolution and no peasant victory. Agrarian revolution will be a hollow phrase if its gains are not consolidated by winning state power. Without that the agrarian revolution would simply become a peasant revolt and would end, at best, in a stunted agrarian reform similar to the one the Cadets had drawn up and which the Mensheviks supported.

#### 4. THE REFORMIST NATURE OF THE MENSHEVIK AGRARIAN PROGRAMME OF MUNICIPALISATION

The agrarian programme of municipalisation clearly reflected the bourgeois-reformist views of the Mensheviks concerning the goals and tasks of the first Russian revolution. The Menshevik leaders adapted it to their political and tactical line aiming at the complete victory of the bourgeoisie. Showing the reformist nature of the Menshevik agrarian programme, Lenin exposed its theoretical errors and the political harm it did to the Marxist party. It was quite clear that the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks would never come to terms on the agrarian question. Having departed from the revolutionary theory of Marxism, the Mensheviks were drifting closer and closer to the Cadets. Suffice it to say that they refused pointblank to accept even the demands put forward by the revolutionary peasant movement.

First, the Mensheviks refused to include in their new agrarian draft the peasant demand of confiscating landed estates, replacing it with their "alienation" projects. But these concepts diverge: confiscation meant revolutionary expropriation, whereas "alienation" stood for purchase or compensation. This approach would orientate the peasants beforehand on a deal with the landowners,

on pleading with them for bearable conditions for obtaining land, and on a reformist, rather than revolutionary way of solving the land question. It was obvious that the Mensheviks feared a broad class struggle and the mighty revolutionary pressure of the peasantry that was coming into evidence throughout the country.

Secondly, from their new agrarian draft the Mensheviks excluded the idea of forming peasant committees, which were to be local revolutionary bodies uniting the rural proletarian and semi-proletarian masses and settling the land question in their favour. Instead, the Mensheviks put forth the idea of forming democratic bodies of self-government (municipalities), which were to unite all estates, regardless of the class distinction. These bodies were to take control of all the alienated land.

Thus, having rejected the revolutionary demands for confiscating landed estates and forming peasant committees, the Mensheviks counted on a peaceful solution of the agrarian question in favour of the bourgeoisie. Lenin compared his own agrarian programme with that of the Mensheviks and concluded that his programme was "a programme of peasant uprising and of the complete fulfilment of the bourgeois-democratic revolution".<sup>1</sup> The Menshevik programme, on the other hand, expressed the fear of a peasant revolution and of a takeover of power by the revolutionary people. It "has turned out in practice to be a Cadet programme, filled with the spirit of a 'deal' and not of a 'peasant revolution'".<sup>2</sup>

Small wonder that the municipalisation programme was hailed by the Cadet ideologists, which greatly pleased the Menshevik leaders. It became known later that already in the First and Second Dumas the Mensheviks had come to terms with the Cadet deputies to work out a common agrarian platform.

Why was the Menshevik programme of municipalisation so attractive to the Cadet bourgeoisie? First of all, because it was economically and politically indefinite, half-baked, and steeped in bourgeois-reformist ideology. The Mensheviks had provided for tactical actions that led to a deal with the reactionary forces, and for an agrarian "revolution" that would be easily defused by the reactionaries. The Mensheviks were afraid of a revolutionary programme. They were eager to set the stage for a half-baked solution of the agrarian question. This is why they adopted the Cadet slogans: compensated "alienation" of land and formation of all-es-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Report on the Unity Congress of the RSDLP", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 339-40.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 337.



tate bodies, i. e. municipalities tantamount, in effect, to the bourgeois-landowner *Zemstvos*.

The Mensheviks had not understood the correlation of class forces in the 1905 revolution, in which the proletariat and peasantry, not the bourgeoisie as the Mensheviks claimed, played the major role. This, indeed, was the reason for their politically incorrect agrarian programme. Marxists gave agrarian revolution full support, working for its fusion with the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in the decisive bid for a political changeover of power in Russia. Contrary to this correct Leninist tactics, the Mensheviks advocated an agrarian revolution in which all power would remain in the hands of the exploiter classes, as though "a radical agrarian revolution is possible in Russia without a radical political revolution".<sup>1</sup>

Having incorrectly evaluated the alignment of class forces, the Mensheviks failed to understand the specific nature of the Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution, which was also a peasant revolution. "The principal source of the error in the tactical line pursued by Plekhanov and his Menshevik followers during the first period of the Russian revolution (i. e., during 1905-07) is their complete failure to understand this correlation between bourgeois revolution in general, and a peasant bourgeois revolution."<sup>2</sup>

The land question was the focal point of the municipalisation programme, dealing mainly with the ownership and distribution of land, not with seizure of land by the peasants. In other words, the Mensheviks were selling the bear's skin before they had killed the bear. The Mensheviks envisaged three types of landownership: a) public (alienated land to be controlled by municipalities, which would rent it to the peasants), b) privately-owned (allotted peasant land), and c) reserve state land intended for migration and resettlement.

The Mensheviks held that this reformist solution of the land question was in keeping with what they thought would be the outcome of the revolution: the bourgeoisie comes to power and establishes a parliamentary bourgeois republic. Glossing over the inconsistencies and the contradictory nature of the programme, its authors tried to prove that municipalisation was the most flexible solution: politically it could be applied regardless of the outcome of the revolution; economically municipalisation was allegedly best

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 352.

suiting to the economic conditions existing in various regions of Russia.

Mensheviks ascribed the central role in the solution of the agrarian question to municipalities, which they regarded as revolutionary bodies of self-government and a bulwark against the reactionary forces. They rejected the idea of peasant committees and maintained that their estate-based principles of organisation would disunite the revolutionary movement, narrow its scope, and alienate "democrats". The Mensheviks also believed that since the socialists demanded abolition of estates, establishment of peasant committees would be a wrong step. Instead, they suggested that the peasants, workers and all democratic forces should unite in large regional bodies of self-government that would not only advance the revolution, but also ward off the pressure of the central government if it remained non-democratic.

The Mensheviks held that municipalisation would be a popular solution creating a type of social ownership that would help peasants understand the ideas of socialism. Lenin ridiculed this petty-bourgeois Menshevik reasoning and called it Manilov's<sup>1</sup> idea of revolution. He said further that municipalisation was a half-measure that narrowed the scope of the peasant movement, forcing it into provincial limits. This solution, he pointed out, reflected a past period. It had been outstripped by peasant movement, which by then reached national scale.

The Mensheviks predicted that the revolution would not win and placed great emphasis on municipalities. They said that bodies of self-government should be strengthened and given financial support by letting them collect the rent for alienated land under their control. This, they held, would bring the interests of all democratic forces still closer to those of the peasantry. The Mensheviks tried hard to prove that there was no risk in handing the land rent to the municipalities, since it would be used for economic, cultural and educational purposes. The municipalities would, supposedly, use the rent to develop the country's productive forces—help peasants, build schools, hospitals, libraries, roads, etc. In short, everything was modelled on the bourgeois-landowner Zemstvos.

The Menshevik municipalisation programme was not only a reactionary, but a futile undertaking. The agrarian movement had advanced considerably and was developing in an entirely different direction. The peasants had found their own means of

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<sup>1</sup> Manilov, a personage in Gogol's *Dead Souls* who was constantly engaged in unrealistic ventures.—Tr.

struggle: throughout the country they were seizing land, confiscating landed estates, driving out tsarist officials, and setting up their own representative bodies.

Under these conditions the task of the Social-Democrats was to organise the peasant movement and plan its every step. This could be done by revolutionary peasant committees in which peasants would join forces in the common struggle for land. These revolutionary bodies of self-government could then destroy the old order.

The municipalisation programme could not satisfy the Party, for it went counter to the developing agrarian revolution. It was intended for an artificial and unlikely deal with the reactionary forces and could not provide the workers' party with a guideline for whatever course the democratic revolution in Russia would take. Municipalisation would be harmful no matter what the outcome of the revolution, for it dampened the revolutionary initiative of the masses and was aimed at establishing futile, all-estate municipalities opposed to the interests of the peasantry.

Indeed, how could those who were taking away the land be at one with those from whom it was being taken? How could the "democratic" regional bodies of self-government combine with a non-democratic central government? Obviously, municipalisation without a democratic republic and dictatorship of the revolutionary people would be both reactionary and harmful.

Lenin resolutely unmasked the Cadet-style arguments of the Mensheviks. "It would be childishly naive to imagine," he wrote, "that because the Zemstvos engage in activities such as supplying water and light, they can engage in the 'activity' of abolishing landlordism.... Yes, in such circumstances the first and most important thing any bourgeois state will have to concern itself with will be to preserve the foundations of bourgeois domination. As soon as the fundamental interests of the bourgeois and landlord state are encroached upon, all rights and privileges as regards autonomous 'tinkering with wash-basins' will be abolished in the twinkling of an eye; all municipalisation will at once be scrapped, and every vestige of democracy in local government bodies will be extirpated by 'punitive expeditions'."<sup>1</sup>

During the polemic on the agrarian question that preceded the congress, the Mensheviks' complete incomprehension of Marx's agrarian theory became evident. In introducing their programme,

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 189.

they drifted to the positions of the Cadets not only for conciliatory political reasons, but also as a result of theoretical confusion. They distorted Marx's agrarian theory and on this basis rejected the existence of absolute rent. The Menshevik theoreticians failed to grasp the economic basis of land nationalisation and created their own dual, controversial programme which provided, on the one hand, for the municipalisation of large landed estates and, on the other, for the retention of private property in allotted peasant land. The programme was extremely harmful, because it depressed the scale of the general national struggle, emphasised the particular instead of the general demands, and obscured the class struggle.

The Mensheviks argued that municipalisation would not present any danger should monarchy be restored. They fiercely opposed Lenin's project for the nationalisation of land, stating that it gave no guarantees against restoration of the monarchy. In effect, at the Fourth Congress the Mensheviks reduced the discussion of the agrarian question to the danger of restoration. The Bolsheviks were justified in stating that the Mensheviks, fearful of a decisive tactic for a decisive victory, were trying to frighten the congress with the spectre of reaction, counter-revolution and restoration.

The Mensheviks referred to the danger of restoration and declared that nationalisation was unacceptable because it was closely linked with a decisive revolutionary-democratic overturn and the establishment of a republic, which would inevitably turn the peasants against the revolution. They held that the peasants would never agree to turning the land over to the state, however democratic it might be. Besides, in their opinion, it was dangerous to turn the land over to the state, for this would materially strengthen the central power and make it independent of the will of the people and popular representation.

The Mensheviks considered nationalisation unacceptable from a historical point of view, too, because in Russia there had evolved a special situation, with the land and its tillers having been in bondage, which gave birth to a specific Russian despotism. That is why, they said, if despotism was to be done away with, its economic foundation had to be eliminated, while nationalisation would, supposedly, only consolidate it. Moreover, by turning the land over to the state one would only cultivate the peasants' blind faith in the state. To render nationalisation harmless there should be a guarantee against any restoration, but no such guarantee did or could exist. Hence, nationalisation did not secure the gains of revolution strongly enough.

Finally, the Mensheviks maintained that Lenin's project presupposed seizure of power, which was possible through a socialist revolution. Insofar as the Russian revolution was a bourgeois-democratic one, however, there could be no question of the proletariat seizing power. So, rejecting the possibility of seizing power, the Mensheviks also rejected land nationalisation. Lenin showed the political basis of this standpoint. "This argument about the absence of guarantees against restoration," he wrote, "is a purely Cadeï idea: it is the bourgeoisie's political weapon against the proletariat. The interests of the bourgeoisie force it into struggling to prevent the proletariat from completing the bourgeois-democratic revolution jointly with the revolutionary peasantry.... The sharpening of political contradictions and of the political struggle results in reaction, says the bourgeois for the edification of the workers: therefore these contradictions must be *blunted*. Rather than run the risk of reaction coming after victory, it would be better not to fight for victory, but to strike a bargain with reaction."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin scoffed at the Mensheviks' fear of restoration. "If we mean a real, fully effective economic guarantee against restoration, that is, a guarantee that would create the economic conditions precluding restoration, then we shall have to say: the only guarantee against restoration is a socialist revolution in the West. There can be no other guarantee in the real and full sense of the term. Without this condition, in whichever other way the problem is solved (municipalisation, division of the land, etc.), restoration will be not only possible, but positively inevitable."<sup>2</sup>

Lenin pointed out that, speaking of a conditional guarantee, nationalisation of land would be the best such guarantee, for it would sweep all the old medieval garbage out of the villages. So, after such a purge it would be impossible to completely restore the old economic order, even if there was a political restoration. This was proved by the French Revolution. After its defeat, the political restoration could not re-establish the old, feudal system.

As for Plekhanov's assertion that tsarist restoration would find support in the established traditions of the peasants who had in the old days regarded all land as "the tsar's land", it reposed on a misrepresentation of history. "Insofar as (or if) the land was nationalised in Muscovy, the economic basis of this nationalisa-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Report on the Unity Congress of the RSDLP", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Unity Congress of the RSDLP", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 280.

tion was the *Asiatic mode of production*. But it is the *capitalist mode of production* that became established in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, and is absolutely predominant in the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup>

Lenin was convinced that only if the revolution continued, with the bourgeois-democratic growing into a socialist revolution, there would be the right conditions for radically changing the existing socio-political order in Russia and awakening the proletariat of Western Europe, spurring it to socialist revolution and triggering a chain reaction that would sweep away the reactionary forces. That is why it was so important to ensure a decisive and consistent bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia and carry it forward to a true socialist revolution.

## 5. THE REVOLUTIONARY-DEMOCRATIC NATURE OF THE AGRARIAN PROGRAMME OF LAND DIVISION

Most of the Bolshevik delegates to the Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP were in favour of dividing up of the landed estates and transferring them to the peasants. Prior to the congress, the “divisionists” drew up a special programme which, though it differed considerably from Lenin’s nationalisation programme, was wholly opposed to the Mensheviks’ municipalisation project. In analysing the two agrarian projects, Lenin said: “municipalisation is wrong and harmful; division, as a programme, is mistaken, but not harmful.... In the first place, division cannot be harmful, because the peasants will agree to it; and in the second place, it does not have to be made conditional on the consistent reorganisation of the state. Why is it mistaken? Because it one-sidedly regards the peasant movement only in the light of the past and present, and gives no consideration to the future.”<sup>2</sup>

The “divisionists” tried to fit the revolutionary agrarian movement going on in Russia into the old scheme that prevailed among Social-Democrats at the time, without taking account of the new historical conditions characteristic of the first Russian revolution. It was not the “divisionists”’ fault but their misfortune that they failed to understand Lenin’s theory of the growth of revolution.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Report on the Unity Congress of the RSDLP”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Report on the Unity Congress of the RSDLP”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 344-45.

That is why the "divisionists" could not offer convincing arguments when opposing nationalisation. They argued that 1) the peasants would not support nationalisation of landed estates because they wanted them as their own property; 2) the peasants would be against nationalisation because they would see it as an encroachment on the land they already owned; 3) Marxists must not advocate nationalisation, because after the bourgeois-democratic revolution wins Russia will be a bourgeois, not a socialist state with the concentration of the huge reserve of land as state property only aiding the bourgeoisie and weakening the proletariat.

Though experienced in revolutionary work among the masses, the "divisionists" lacked a clear theoretical view of the new conditions and of the changes in the alignment of class forces that determined the development and orientation of the Russian revolution. But it is to their credit all the same that their programme responded to the immediate interests of the peasantry, and encompassed all the revolutionary-democratic objectives. Their programme was directed against royal and gentry landownership and aimed at a complete victory of the peasant revolution and at the final abolition of serfdom and the privileges of the ruling classes.

Their draft included revolutionary demands, such as expropriation of large landowners through confiscation of their lands and establishment of revolutionary peasant committees for decisive action against the landowners and tsarist officials. The main point of the "divisionists'" project read: "The Party supports the revolutionary struggle of the peasants, including seizure of land, and will work for: 1) the establishment of peasant committees as an organisational form of the peasant movement for the immediate abolition of all traces of landowner power and landowners' privileges and for full control over the seized land until new land laws are adopted by the popular constituent assembly."<sup>1</sup>

The "divisionists" linked their demands with the task of establishing a truly democratic state as a necessary condition for preserving the new land order. Their draft read, in part: "Decisive measures for improving the condition of the peasantry are possible only in a democratic republic, and without a decisive victory of a democratic revolution the land seizures can only be partial and unstable, while the struggle of the peasants for their land demands compels them to be allies of the proletariat in the political struggle until the final victory of a democratic revolution; this victory can

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<sup>1</sup> *Chetvyorty (Obyedinitelny) syezd RSDLP. Protokoly*, (The Fourth [Unity] Congress of the RSDLP. Minutes), Moscow, 1959, pp. 74-75 (in Russian).

be consolidated by taking the land from the reactionary classes of the old society and turning them over to the agricultural population.”<sup>1</sup>

The draft envisaged the nationalisation of forests, minerals, and water resources, and the preservation of those large capitalist farms that could be operated as communal farms once they become public property. As for nationalising all land, this was to be done in the future when the situation ripened for the transfer of power to the proletariat and a socialist revolution took place.

The draft also called for organising the rural proletariat, which was in full accord with Lenin’s proposition. The draft stressed that Social-Democrats were “determined, under any conditions of democratic agrarian change, to strive for the independent class organisation of the rural proletariat, to explain the irreconcilable antithesis between its interests and the interests of the peasant bourgeoisie; to warn it against the temptation of setting up small farmsteads that would never, under the system of commodity production, do away with poverty, and, finally, to point out the necessity of a socialist revolution as the only means of doing away with all poverty and all exploitation”.<sup>2</sup>

The programme of the “divisionists” had serious faults. First, division of landed estates could not radically break up the old system of landownership, which was steeped in feudalism. It merely provided for the joining of landed estates to the peasant land. Second, division would do no more than merely turn the landed estates over to peasants. Thus, it would limit the further development of the revolution and predetermine an interval between the democratic and socialist revolutions. Third, division went counter to the outlook of the advanced peasant representatives, who had realised the need for abolishing private landownership and favoured general land nationalisation.

Lenin did not reject division, but thought it desirable for it to be preceded by nationalisation, which would in best of all further the development of the revolution. “‘Everything in good season.’ Social-Democracy cannot undertake never to support division of the land. In a different historical situation, at a different stage of agrarian evolution, this division may prove unavoidable.”<sup>3</sup>

The mistake of the “divisionists” was that they did not under-

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, “The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution. 1905–1907”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 293.



stand Lenin's theory of the continuity of revolution. They were carried away by the objectives of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, accommodating their agrarian programme to it, and not exceeding the limits of a democratic overturn and the abolition of the monarchy and landowner rule. It would have been a stride forward to economic progress. But the Marxist party had to go further.

Lenin made a critical analysis of the "divisionists'" draft and came to the conclusion that in order to eliminate possible differences over the agrarian question, he would not object to its being adopted. But if the division draft were accepted, he intended to submit his own draft on nationalisation as an amendment that would not change the substance of the matter but would facilitate a solution. The Bolsheviks, headed by Lenin, opposed the Menshevik draft programme both before and during the congress.

The Mensheviks rejected the division draft for what they termed as two reasons: first, it would be harmful from the economic point of view, as it would perpetuate the peasants' small property, while Social-Democrats should be against it; second, it would be harmful from a political point of view, as the petty proprietor would be satisfied with the extra land he got and would even oppose socialism.

The Bolsheviks rejected these arguments. As regards the first, the "divisionists" said that the Marxists were, in principle, against private property in the implements and means of production, including land. However, in drawing up their agrarian demands they always considered the existing situation and the historical conditions, and decided on when to demand abolition of private landownership depending on the situation.

Indeed, in those European countries where the bourgeois revolutions had long since occurred and where socialist revolution and the workers' takeover of state power were on the order of the day, the agrarian demands ought, naturally, to correspond to the objectives of a socialist revolution. The Marxist parties of these countries ought to oppose private ownership of land and work for the expropriation of large landed estates. In Russia, however, the immediate aim was that of bourgeois-democratic revolution, and the agrarian demands had to correspond to its goals and tasks. Overthrow of the monarchy and abolition of landed estates would be the most favourable result of such a revolution. Hence, replacement of the oppressive system of landed estates by a system of small-scale peasant production would be an important step for-

ward, facilitating the further development of the class struggle and a radical change in agrarian relations.

It was not, therefore, a question of perpetuating small-scale peasant production, but of satisfying the demands of the peasantry and supporting its struggle against the system of landed estates. "Thus, we take our stand—by way of exception and by reason of the specific historical circumstances—as defenders of small property; but we defend it only in its struggle against what has come down from the 'old order', and only on condition that those institutions be abolished which retard the transformation of the patriarchal Oblomov villages, frozen in their immobility, backwardness, and neglect...."<sup>1</sup>

Rebutting the Mensheviks' charge that the "divisionist" agrarian programme was a shift to the Narodnik "general redistribution" idea, Lenin stressed that this agrarian demand should not be seen in an exclusively negative light. The reactionary utopianism of the "general redistribution" idea, he said, consisted in an attempt of "generalising and perpetuating small-scale peasant production, but it also contains ... a revolutionary element, namely, the desire to sweep away by means of a peasant revolt all the remnants of the serf-owning system".<sup>2</sup> Lenin said further that "while by no means a socialist measure, a 'general redistribution' would give a powerful impetus to the development of capitalism, to the growth of the home market, to an improvement in the conditions of the peasantry, to the disintegration of the village commune, to the development of class contradictions in the countryside and to the eradication of all vestiges of the old, feudal bondage system in Russia".<sup>3</sup>

Marx had pointed out that the economic process in the Russian countryside would inevitably lead to the replacement of communal landownership by small-scale peasant production as a transitional step towards large-scale capitalist production. The socio-economic relations in West European agriculture had followed this path, and it would also be followed in the Russian countryside. Marx wrote: "*Private property* produced by the labour of the individual ... is supplanted by *capitalistic private property*, which rests on the exploitation of the labour of others, on wage labour."<sup>4</sup> Russia

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Russian Social-Democracy", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1975, p. 319.

would not escape this. In Europe, however, where the system of communal landownership had long since been eliminated, the given process had been on a higher stage. "In this development in Western Europe it is a question of the *transformation of one form of private property into another form of private property*. In case of the Russian peasants one would on the contrary have to *transform their common property into private property*."<sup>1</sup>

This gives rise to the question whether the Bolshevik "divisionists" were really shifting to the agrarian positions of the Narodniks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. There are no grounds to think so. The "general redistribution" concept aimed at perpetuating small-scale peasant production on the basis of communal landownership. The Narodniks did not see that the economic nature of such production inevitably led to capitalist rather than socialist developments in agriculture. As regards the agrarian programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, it called for the consolidation of small-scale peasant production as a transitional step in the development of capitalist agriculture, though it clothed this idea in socialist rhetorics. The Socialist-Revolutionaries' talk of the stability of small-scale peasant production, of its vitality and independence, was but further proof of their theoretical backwardness and incomprehension of the laws of socio-economic development.

The agrarian programme of the "divisionists", on the other hand, was a revolutionary document despite its theoretical faults. The "divisionists" said quite frankly that their agrarian programme was not a socialist, but a petty-bourgeois programme. Still, they considered it the most revolutionary measure in the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution. While giving preference to small-scale peasant production rather than the landed estates of the gentry, they made it clear that they regarded it as a transitional stage during which the groundwork for a socialist revolution and the abolition of all private landownership would be laid.

The supporters of division tore to shreds the Menshevik-municipalisationists' second argument that division would alienate the peasants from socialism and that after receiving additional plots they would side with the bourgeoisie against the working class. Yes, this danger could not be ruled out, they said, but noted that the peasant would never immediately become a Socialist no matter what the solution of the agrarian question would be, municipalisation or nationalisation. Not division as a form of land use would

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 320.

alienate the peasant from socialism but the small farmstead and his private-property psychology

The peasants as small-scale producers are not a social class. Because of the retrograde nature they gravitated towards the bourgeoisie but under favourable conditions could become a reliable ally of the working class. The Marxists' duty was to work for this and the programme of the divisions was undoubtedly directed to this end. It rallied the peasant masses for a decisive struggle against the landowners and aligned them with the revolutionary struggle of the working class.

The divisions admitted that the type of landownership was of great importance in setting the stage for the social development of agriculture, though in the final analysis it was not decisive. They were right in indicating that the peasantry would follow the path of socialism only if there was a social revolution with the proletariat taking state power.

## 6 THE AGRARIAN QUESTION AS THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF THE INNER-PARTY STRUGGLE AT THE FOURTH CONGRESS OF THE RSDLP

A heated and tense controversy erupted over the agrarian programme at the Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP held in Stockholm in the spring of 1906. Five reports, all with different points of view, were submitted for discussion. These were on nationalisation by Lenin, on municipalisation by Maslov and Pekhanov, on behalf of the RSDLP Central Committee's Agrarian Commission by Schmidt, and on division of land by Borsova. The speakers submitted as many as four different drafts of the agrarian programme.

During the discussion of these drafts three more drafts were submitted on keeping the old programme with a few minor changes (presented by Rozhkov) on renouncing an agrarian programme altogether and adopting a tactical resolution providing for the confiscation of landed estates which were then to be turned over to the peasant committees (presented by Strumlin and Lyadov) and finally a draft submitted by the Lettish Social-Democrats who insisted on a special agrarian programme for the Baltic Area where the number of rural proletarians was higher than elsewhere.

The debate on the agrarian question was closely linked with tactical issues denuding the wholly disparate views of the Bo-

sheviks and Mensheviks on the general objectives of the revolution, its motive forces and final goals. Hence, the differences in the approach to the agrarian question in Russia. In the course of the long discussion, attention was focussed mainly on three drafts: nationalisation, municipalisation, and division. The delegates displayed no interest in Rozhkov's draft, and it fell off by itself. The same happened to the draft of the Lettish Social-Democrats. As for the draft submitted by Strumilin and Lyadov, it was put to the vote along with the other drafts and received a considerable number of votes of both factions. The draft of the Central Committee's Agrarian Commission headed by Schmidt drew still more attention.

All this showed how difficult the agrarian question was for the Russian Social-Democrats. No wonder it caused such turmoil at the congress. Significant differences arose between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and among Mensheviks as well as among Bolsheviks. As a result none of the drafts received majority approval.

This applied especially to the Mensheviks, many of whom voted for municipalisation, and for division, and for the tactical resolution as well. Plekhanov's behaviour was typical. During the pre-congress discussion he supported Maslov's municipalisation draft, but at the congress inclined towards division, stating that "if we had failed to achieve it [municipalisation.—S.T.], division should have been preferred in the interests of the revolution".<sup>1</sup> After the severe criticism of Maslov's draft, Plekhanov, Dan and others hastened to correct it, making it still more vague and confused. Which prompted A. V. Lunacharsky (Voinov) to describe it as "castrated municipalisation".<sup>2</sup>

There was also some wavering among the Bolsheviks, with some supporting the tactical resolution but voting for division, or vice versa. Some Bolsheviks were against nationalisation, but spoke for its adoption if the peasantry would call for it. As a result, Schmidt's Agrarian Commission, appointed by the Central Committee to work out a draft agrarian programme to be adopted at the congress, introduced a dual formula in Lenin's draft: "The Party will: (Variant 1) strive for the abolition of private ownership of land and for making all land the common property of the people; (Variant 2) support the struggle of the revolutionary peasantry for the abolition of private ownership of land and strive for the transfer of all land to the state."

<sup>1</sup> *The Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP. Minutes*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 563.

But speaking of the Bolsheviks' different attitudes to the agrarian question, it should be borne in mind that all of them had one central idea: confiscation of landed estates and their transfer to revolutionary peasant committees. That is why the Bolsheviks, in their dispute with the Mensheviks, followed one policy in the discussions, and in the voting did their utmost to nullify the Mensheviks' municipalisation idea. For the sake of this unity, Lenin withdrew the nationalisation draft and gave his support to the Bolshevik divisionists.

Lunacharsky delivered a vivid speech against Plekhanov's municipalisation, pointing out that "the precondition of Lenin's programme was the complete and brilliant victory of the revolution", while the Menshevik draft was based on a more possible result, i.e. an easier, closer, vaguer, and more half-baked one.<sup>1</sup> Lunacharsky said that "Lenin's nationalisation was a demand for the best distribution of land in a bourgeois-democratic state. While there is hope of victory and of a favourable outcome of the liberation movement for the proletariat, we must take this into consideration and put forth our most resolute and broadest slogans."<sup>2</sup>

Lyadov, though opposing the adoption of an agrarian programme in general, supported Lenin's stand on nationalisation. He said: "All those who are against nationalisation have forgotten that nationalisation can only be a result of the victory of the revolutionary movement; it is closely linked with this victory. We are not drawing up an agrarian programme for peaceful development, and this should be kept in mind. All the objections made by Plekhanov, Dan and others cannot be accepted. From this point of view we propose to use Lenin's draft as the basis."<sup>3</sup>

Schmidt and Borisov were especially sharp and convincing. Although they held different opinions on the agrarian programme, they firmly rejected municipalisation in their final statements. Schmidt, speaking on behalf of the Agrarian Commission, declared that though he was not an advocate of nationalisation, he considered Lenin's reasoning profoundly substantiated and convincing.<sup>4</sup>

The "divisionist" Borisov rejected the Maslov-Plekhanov draft, and did not object to including Lenin's demand for nationalisation as an amendment in the draft on division, providing it was intended for the future.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP. Minutes*, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 98, 99.

<sup>3</sup> *The Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP. Minutes*, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 153-54.

What was the overall result? The Lyadov-Strumilin proposal of adopting only a tactical resolution on land confiscation by peasant committees was considered before the voting on the main drafts. Some Mensheviks supported this proposal. The result of the voting was as follows: 83 in favour of adopting an agrarian programme, 21 against, and 6 abstained. This meant that 27 delegates were in one way or another inclined not to have any agrarian programme.<sup>1</sup>

The Menshevik municipalisation draft was the first to be put to the vote. Its results were: (first vote) 52 in favour, 44 against and 14 abstained; (second vote) 61 in favour, 46 against and 3 abstained. Thus, in the first vote the Menshevik draft had an edge of 8 votes and in the second of 15.

The second draft to be put to the vote was the draft presented by the Agrarian Commission. It was close to Lenin's draft, and Lenin voted for it. The results of the voting were: 20 in favour, 61 against and 29 abstained. Finally, the division draft, for which Lenin also voted, was put to the vote. The results were: 41 in favour, 57 against and 12 abstained.

In the course of the discussion and the voting it became evident that most of the delegates had vague or erroneous views on the agrarian question. A sharp exchange took place both during the discussion and during the voting. The Bolsheviks presented a united front against the Menshevik municipalisation draft. When it gained a majority, the Bolsheviks managed to introduce some important amendments.

The Bolsheviks succeeded in having an amendment adopted that called for the confiscation rather than alienation of all privately-owned land. The second Bolshevik amendment gave the peasants a right to divide up "those landed estates on which small-scale peasant production already existed or which were needed to keep it going".<sup>2</sup>

The introductory part of the agrarian programme was also changed radically. The petty-bourgeois phrase, "defending small

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP. Minutes*, p. 157. Lyadov and Strumilin's resolution: "Taking into account that all the submitted draft agrarian programmes are of a temporary and purely tactical nature; and that the agrarian programme of the Social-Democrats, a proletarian party, cannot, in general, be of any other nature, the RSDLP Congress resolves: to annul the agrarian programme adopted at the Second Congress and to adopt the tactical resolution on the agrarian question which corresponds to the present moment" (*ibid.*, p. 156).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP. Minutes*, p. 523.

proprietors", was eliminated. In the concluding part of the programme it was pointed out that the rural proletariat should be independently organised, and that "a complete socialist takeover should be accomplished as the only means of doing away with poverty and exploitation."<sup>1</sup>

But the Bolsheviks were not able to amend the Menshevik draft on two points of principle: First the Mensheviks refused point-blank to accept an amendment on the necessity of forming revolutionary peasant committees, and the demand of forming all-estate regional municipalities was left intact. Second, the Mensheviks were against the Bolshevik amendment calling for "a democratic republic" instead of "a democratic state".

The new agrarian programme adopted with some amendments, included the following demands: 1 abolition of all estate infringements on the peasant rights and property; 2 abolition of all payments and obligations connected with the identity of peasants as a social-estate, and writing off of unfair debts; 3 confiscation of church, monastery, appanage and Cabinet land, which is to be turned over (together with public land) to major bodies of local self-government encompassing rural and urban districts; 4 confiscation of privately-owned land, except small farmsteads, which is to be turned over to local bodies of self-government.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the significant amendments to the Menshevik municipalisation draft, the new agrarian programme could not satisfy the Party because of its inconsistent nature. In the final vote, opinions differed sharply: 62 in favour of the programme, 42 against, and 7 abstained.<sup>3</sup> The Menshevik draft won a majority only because more Menshevik delegates were present.

Thus, the Fourth (Unity) Congress failed to unite the Party's two factions, because opinions on all tactical and practical questions differed too greatly. The adoption of a reformist agrarian programme was the last straw. The need to revise the agrarian programme was as vital after the congress as it had been before it. Evaluating the agrarian programme adopted at the Fourth Congress, Lenin said: "In practice, our Party programme remains the programme of a deal with reaction. If we take its real political significance in the present situation in Russia ... it is not a Social-Democratic programme, but a Cadet programme."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 522.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Report on the Unity Congress of the RSDLP", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 337.



Subsequent events proved that the programme was untenable. It did not attract any attention in the Duma, while the demand for land nationalisation gained an enthusiastic response among the peasant and Narodnik deputies. This was understandable. Those who stood for a peasant revolution, for a break-up of existing agricultural relations and for a revolutionary republican regime, naturally saw the need for nationalising land as the only radical measure which would sweep away all obstacles to the progressive development of agriculture in Russia.

During the period after the first revolution, the Social-Democrats were, in effect, left without an agrarian programme. The Mensheviks forgot their municipalisation programme and were gradually shifting to the viewpoint of the Cadets, with whom they had already established close ties. As for the Bolsheviks, they could not take guidance in the reformist programme the Mensheviks had saddled them with at the Fourth RSDLP Congress.

The Fifth All-Russia Conference, held in December 1908, again discussed the agrarian question and drew up a tactical resolution on the work of the Party in the environment created by the Stolypin regime. The resolution pointed to the necessity of "explaining to the masses the meaning and significance of the autocracy's new policy and the role of the socialist proletariat which, while pursuing an independent class policy, should guide the democratic peasantry in its present-day policy and in the coming revolutionary struggle. The aim of this struggle is, as before, the overthrow of tsarism and the takeover of political power by the proletariat, supported by the revolutionary strata of the peasantry, and carrying out a bourgeois-democratic coup by convening a popular constituent assembly and establishing a democratic republic."<sup>1</sup>

In order to lead the revolutionary struggle of the working class and the peasantry, the Bolsheviks put forward three slogans: 1) a democratic republic; 2) an eight-hour working day; 3) confiscation of landed estates. With these slogans, the Party united the working class and the peasantry and brought them to victory over the monarchy in the second bourgeois-democratic revolution.

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 1, p. 251.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SECOND LANDOWNER AGRARIAN REFORM— AGAIN PLUNDER AND ENSLAVEMENT

#### 1 THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC AIMS OF THE STOLYPIN AGRARIAN REFORM

Whenever the ruling classes resorted to socio-economic reforms they invariably promised the masses prosperity. The 1861 Reform which procured complete freedom in all spheres of public and private life was a vivid example. It promised Russia public well-being and a rapid development of the country's productive forces and the working people promised personal prosperity and material security. But the landowner Reform fulfilled none of its promises.

During the 45 years that followed the Reform Russia's industrial development was extremely slow, hewing its way through the unwieldy conservative feudal landowner routine. Agriculture remained at the same low level. The nation was becoming more and more dependent on foreign capital. The country suffered the most and was equipped by severe crises. The peasants were as downtrodden and as deprived of all rights as before.

Now the ruling classes decided to repeat the reactionary scheme, supplying it with new anti-commune arguments. As a result of an unpopular deal between the bourgeois-monarchist parties a Back-Hundred government headed by Stolypin, a rich landowner, was put in power. It rejected the Duma's agrarian projects, brutally suppressed the revolutionary worker-peasant movement and proclaimed the second agrarian reform. Once again the ruling classes promised the working peasantry a possible bettering, describing the Stolypin reform as the height of generosity, a plan of great change, a second emancipation, etc.

The propaganda of the Stolypin reform were carefully described in a resolution of the Fifth All-Russian Conference of the RSDLP held in December 1908. It read: "The old serfdom autocracy is decaying, taking another step towards becoming a bourgeois

monarchy, concealing absolutism behind false constitutional forms. The alliance between tsarism and the Black-Hundred landowners and large merchant and industrial bourgeoisie was openly consolidated and recognised by the state coup of June 3 and by the establishment of the Third Duma. The autocracy was compelled to direct Russia along the road of capitalist development, attempting at the same time to preserve the power and profits of the landowners, and thus manoeuvring between them and the bourgeoisie. Their minor misunderstandings are being used to support absolutism, which, together with these classes, launched a violent counter-revolutionary struggle against the socialist proletariat and the democratic peasantry who have displayed their strength in the recent mass struggle."<sup>1</sup>

The Stolypin government began by encouraging Black-Hundred raids and passed numerous agrarian laws heralding a new era in the development of Russia's agriculture. Two important decrees issued in November 1906 were the keystone of the agrarian legislature. They guaranteed the peasants a right to withdraw from the commune, made the allotments the peasants were to receive their private property and permitted a peasant to mortgage his allotment at the Peasant Bank.

Stolypin believed that in 20 years his agrarian reform would bring about a radical change in agriculture and would help create a new economic order in the countryside.

Analysing the political essence of Stolypin's agrarian policy Lenin wrote: "The change in the agrarian policy of the autocracy is of exceptionally great importance for a 'peasant' country like Russia." "This change is not an accident, it is not the fluctuations in ministerial lines of action, not an invention of the bureaucracy. No, it is a profound 'shift' towards agrarian Bonapartism, towards a liberal (economically understood, i.e. bourgeois) policy in the sphere of peasant land relations. Bonapartism is the manoeuvring on the part of a monarchy which has lost its old patriarchal or feudal, simple and solid, foundation—a monarchy which is obliged to walk the tightrope in order not to fall, make advances in order to govern, bribe in order to gain affections, fraternise with the dregs of society, with plain thieves and swindlers, in order not to rely only on bayonets."<sup>2</sup>

The Stolypin government resorted to anti-democratic methods:

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 1, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Assessment of the Present Situation", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 269.

though it had no legal right to issue laws that were not first approved by the Duma, it nevertheless adopted and published its own laws under the guise of temporary decrees, many of which were legally passed after having been in force for years.

### *A. Forcible Destruction of the Peasant Commune*

What made Stolypin change Russia's agrarian policy so radically, if only recently, on the eve of the first revolution there had prevailed in government circles a conviction that the communal system of landownership should by all means be preserved? Then, quite suddenly, there was a complete about-face. It would certainly be a mistake to believe that Stolypin was the only one to see a new path of agricultural development amidst the general confusion and led Russia along it with a firm hand. In fact, the situation was quite different.

The ideas of his reform had long before taken shape among the liberal intelligentsia and were also supported by a number of statesmen. Although the leaders of the bourgeois-monarchist parties sometimes criticised Stolypin's agrarian measures, they did so only for the sake of appearances. There were important objective factors that had long before paved the way for change in the socio-economic relations in the countryside. Stolypin could see just a little farther than those who believed as he did, and he had a better understanding of the need for these agrarian changes.

This understanding was based on a number of factors. [First] in the course of the post-Reform period the country's economy and especially its agriculture were in a state of complete ruin, thus threatening the very existence of the state; [second,] the predominance of feudal exploitation and the further impoverishment of the peasant masses led to a mighty agrarian movement which grew into a popular revolution, this, in turn, threatening the existence of the monarchist-landowner order; [third,] Russia's marked economic backwardness compared with West European capitalist countries made it dependent on foreign capital, and this was a threat to the country's integrity and independence.

Obviously, in an agrarian country like the Russia of that time the agrarian problem was extremely pressing. Russia's fate depended on a correct solution of this problem. Besides, the outdated system of landownership was being replaced by a system of free peasant landownership which cleared the way for capitalist development. This inevitable socio-economic process developed in spite of the

obstacles created by the obsolete forces represented by the landowners, the nobles and the monarchist state.

Naturally, the reform needed in these conditions was one that would abolish the old system of landownership and the survivals of serfdom. The landed estates had to be turned over to the peasants, who were the true owners, and the development and intensification of agriculture were of the greatest importance. The state and national interests called for this way of development, one that would eliminate the centuries-old backwardness of agriculture and the poverty of the peasantry.

However, Stolypin chose another road to solve the agrarian question, one that was contrary to the natural course of socio-economic development. His agrarian reform did not encroach upon the landowners' property, nor did it free the peasants from economic and personal dependence upon the landowners. Stolypin used the power of the state to first do away with the communal system of landownership, regarding it as the main reason for "land-hunger" and agricultural backwardness.

In the course of fulfilling this task the Stolypin agrarian reform provided for the establishment of a new system of land exploitation based on individual farmsteads and holdings in accordance with the system of capitalist farming. At first, the farmsteads were to absorb the peasant allotments and later to merge with the landed estates of the gentry. This road was obviously the most prolonged and agonising one for the peasantry.

Stolypin was aware that in order to carry out his agrarian reform there had to be social forces that would support the government. The majority of the peasantry would certainly be opposed to a reform that was counter to their interests. As for the landowners, they were too weak to be of help. So was the industrial bourgeoisie: it was too insignificant in numbers and its interests did not always coincide with those of the landowners.

Therefore, a strong social force capable of putting the government's agrarian policy into practice had to be found. The Stolypin government decided to create such a force among the peasantry by singling out a substantial stratum of landowners, i.e. a new group of rural bourgeois that would faithfully serve the government, be an ally of the landlords, and a bulwark against the peasant masses.

In order to carry out its mission this new bourgeois class had to possess the following features: it had to be politically conservative and capable of defending not only its own landed property but also that of the gentry and the landowners; it had to be economi-

cally strong and progressive and capable of raising the productive forces of agriculture; it had to be large in order to come into ownership, in the future, of all land.

The principal idea of the Stolypin agrarian reform and all agrarian legislature was, first, to destroy the peasant commune and to create on the ruins a new, individual farmstead and holding system of landownership; and, [second] to speed up the stratification of the peasantry and the process of its being deprived of its land; and then, on the base of private landownership, to create a new class of landowners out of the more prosperous peasantry.

Of interest, in this respect, is the decree of 9 November 1906, the government's main anti-commune document. It gave every peasant the right to withdraw from the commune together with his allotment, securing as his property a certain amount of land. The communes could also divide the entire commune land, save the farmyard and the adjacent small plot, for individual holdings (by a two-thirds majority vote).

The decree was mainly to stimulate individual initiative and establish private instead of family ownership of land, which until then had prevailed in peasant communes. According to the decree, the land of peasants who withdrew from the commune became the private property of the head of the family, not of the family as a whole. Thus, the former family principle of landownership was being replaced by a private right of succession, paving the way to the development of capitalism in agriculture. ✓

This new regulation was supported by a governmental decree issued on 15 November 1906 which permitted the owners of land to mortgage their plots at the Peasant Bank. The law of 14 June 1910 took further steps against the commune: from then on, peasant plots could be freely bought and sold.

The communal system of land use was attacked by all forces of the Stolypin regime, the political and economic bodies of the central government and the local authorities. An anti-commune campaign was launched by the great army of reactionary journalists, writers, economists and lawyers, all of whom discredited the peasant commune. What arguments did the opponents of the commune, its recent and ardent advocates, put forth?

*The first and main argument was undoubtedly political.* The peasant commune had freed itself from the control of the tsar and the government, had ceased being their stalwart support and was becoming increasingly unruly and opposed to the landowner-monarchist state. This became especially clear during the first Russian revolution. That is why reactionary propaganda came to

regard the peasant commune as a dangerous unit which undermined the peasantry's former respect for landed estates. The ruling classes were in constant fear of the revolutionary peasantry, whose strength steadily increased.

The second argument concerned the social-economic foundations of the communal landownership, the main source of peasant "land-hunger", economic backwardness and feudal isolation. The main stress was placed on directing Russia towards private peasant landownership which, in turn, would lead to a concentration of capitalist landownership, to the increasing stratification of the countryside and to increasing the landowners' enterprise. In other words, Russia's agriculture was making a historical passage to a new qualitatively form of landownership with all the consequences this entailed. From an economic point of view this was undoubtedly a step forward.

And, finally, the third argument, which was of a purely economic nature. The commune was blamed for the strip farming, fragmentation of arable land, distant plots and compulsory crop rotation. This was the strongest argument against the communal system of landownership. Indeed, in Russia arable land was fragmented to the limit. Due to the natural increase of the peasant population and the annual redistributions of land, Russia's arable land was divided into small plots that could be cultivated only by manual labour. Suffice it to say that in some areas close to one-third of the arable land was taken up by boundary lines between the plots.

The Stolypin agrarian reform was directed against the peasant commune, viewed as the main reason for the country's agricultural backwardness and as the greatest obstacle to progress in agriculture. This purely economic argument against communal landownership was quite convincing. The reform was meant to bring about a socio-political, rather than economic, change. That is why the first stage of the reform was to change the type of landownership, doing away with family-communal ownership and establishing private, inheritable landed property. According to realistic appraisals by contemporaries, this was a time of great "land turmoil" and of disorganisation in peasant households and agriculture in general.

### *B. Setting Up the Individual Farmstead and Holding System of Landownership*

After a moral, political and organisational period of preparation for destroying the communal type of landownership, the Stolypin

government proceeded with its own plan of land use, the foundation of Russia's future agrarian system. It was a 20-year plan, which was to turn communal and homestead land into individual farmsteads and holdings, with the estates of landlords and the gentry, the appanage land and all other types of land to be divided likewise later. This broad plan was to bring about reorganisation of agriculture throughout the country.

*On the socio-political plane* this new system of landownership was to create a numerous and economically strong class of landowners, to buttress respect for the "sanctity" of private property, and so turn the new class into its dependable defenders against any encroachments. At the same time, the new system was to create a huge reserve army of landless peasants, giving the farmsteaders and landowners a source of cheap labour.

The Stolypin government was obviously aware that the rural proletariat might present a serious political danger. However, in drawing up its plans it counted on the following: [first] the rural proletariat was not organised politically, was culturally undeveloped, unattached to any class, and less susceptible to the influence of socialist propaganda than the industrial proletariat; [second,] the rural proletariat would be up against the owners of farmsteads and holdings, once fellow-members of the commune who would be better able than anyone else to politically defuse any possible disturbances; finally, a conservative class like the owners of farmsteads and holdings would hardly need any police or military aid in maintaining law and order.

*In the sphere of economic development* the farmstead and holding system was to eliminate the country's agrarian backwardness and promote all branches of agriculture. Stolypin counted on private landownership to cope with this task and drew up a large-scale programme of land use encouraging the farmstead and holding type of agriculture. This meant elimination of strip farming, distant plots, and minute fragmentation. This would pave the way to the use of more advanced farm machinery and implements. Land cultivation would improve, crops would be larger, and these would be an advance to intensive farming.

To understand the new plan of land use, one must know the situation on the eve of the Stolypin agrarian reform. The egalitarian principle on which communal ownership was based placed each member of the commune in an equal position. He received an equal share of all the land of different quality belonging to the commune. As a result, fields were divided up according to the



number of commune members. This resulted in strip farming, typical of Russia.

As the peasant population grew, the commune plots were divided into ever more strips. Needless to describe the consequences of this ungainly system of land use. In the western uyezds of Moscow Gubernia, for example, there were up to 50 strips of land per household.

Strip farming, and tilling narrow strips of land, precluded proper land cultivation. Boundaries, approaches and field roads occupied a large area of arable land and caused the plots to be infested with weeds. In some villages of Moskovsky Uyezd 9 to 15 per cent of the arable land was lost to boundaries and roads.

The existence of distant plots was one of the major evils of equal land distribution. Russia's peasantry had, as a rule, historically settled in large villages. The peasant households were usually situated at the edge of the allotted land, with plots sometimes located dozens of kilometres away.

Many peasants found it impossible to cultivate these distant plots and so they remained either uncultivated or were rented to rich peasants for next to nothing. All this gravely affected the productivity of agriculture. Peasant labour was wasted and the soil was being exhausted, while the peasantry plunged deeper into misery. Russia, a country rich in land, was one of the most agriculturally backward countries of Europe. So, it was obviously of great importance to change the outdated forms of land use.

What practical and historical experience did the Stolypin government rely on when working out its plan of land use? It was certainly not Stolypin's own discovery, and had long existed in Europe and America. Still, Stolypin should be given due credit for his knowledge of the systems of agriculture abroad and the idea of bringing Western experience to Russia. In 1902 he had first spoken of introducing the farmstead and holding system along the lines known in Europe and America.

Let us retrace the evolution of the farmstead and holding system in Europe and America. The establishment of this system on the two continents naturally followed different lines, for there was a great difference in their given history and their socio-economic conditions: the European countries had a thousand-year-old agricultural history and arable land had been divided up and brought under the plough centuries before, while America was a country with a growing agriculture and with vast uninhabited tracts of land. This naturally influenced the type of land use.

The system of plot ownership was put into practice most skillfully in the USA. It was begun in 1784, when all uninhabited land was nationalised. During the following hundred years the government allotted 750 million acres to new settlers, spending a total of 400 million dollars on purchasing land and on the organisation of land use. Before cultivation was begun railroads were built, enabling settlers to start intensive commodity farming. Then a large irrigation system was built, fertilisers were introduced, and land reclamation was begun. Thus, agriculture was developing in two directions: increasing arable land and using advanced agricultural methods. As a result, farmland tripled in area in 50 years (1850-1900), from 108.6 million dessiatines to 311.2 million dessiatines. During the same period irrigation canals were built for 1.3 million dessiatines of arid land in 1889, 2.8 million dessiatines in 1899 and 3.5 million dessiatines in 1902.

At first, the irrigation systems were run by private companies, but in 1890 they were turned over to the state governments and, later, to local farmers' co-operatives. In 1908 the irrigation fund stood at 37 million dollars. Besides, the world's first large network of agricultural research centres and meteorological stations was established. Thus, in the USA the organisation of land use preceded the actual settling of the land. From the very start the farmstead system of agriculture was put on a sound material, scientific and technological basis.

In Europe, the farmstead system of land use had its start in Denmark and Sweden in the 16th-18th centuries, and from Sweden it was later introduced in Finland and the Baltic Area. The introduction of the farmstead system in the North European countries was favoured by their natural conditions: numerous rivers and lakes, varied types of naturally arable land and large tracts of it. The difficulty lay in the absence of roads, though as the farmsteads developed this difficulty was overcome.

In the rest of Europe the farmstead system, dependent as it was on a new type of peasant settlement, began developing later. The process was most drawn-out and agonising in Prussia, where after the "emancipation" Reform of 1821 the reactionary landowners put up a fight against the allotment of commune land. In this respect, agriculture developed in post-Reform Russia and in Prussia along similar patterns. It should be noted that later, too, the Stolypin government borrowed much from Prussia's land legislation and farmstead land use.

We see that the farmstead system advanced from West to East, and reached Russia before the Stolypin reform.

When working out the new reform, the Stolypin government could therefore draw on the experience of America and Western Europe, and chose to follow the Prussian pattern. Land use became an object of state policy and was, according to Stolypin, the keystone of the agrarian reform. It was promoted with the aid of the Peasant Bank, land use commissions, resettlement, and certain stimulating measures aimed at developing credit and agricultural co-operatives, etc.

Undoubtedly, from an economic point of view the Stolypin agrarian reform was a progressive measure: it met the pressing need for developing the productive forces. Objectively, it led to the formation of a new agrarian system, heightened productivity, and enhanced the stratification of the peasantry. But such a plan could only be effective if landed estates were abolished and there was a radical change in the old medieval relations, the main evil of Russia's agricultural system.

It goes without saying that the Stolypin government, supported as it was by the rich reactionary landowners, could not take these measures. The incompatibility of these opposing directions doomed the new agrarian scheme to failure because of the reactionary methods used in carrying it out. The five-year Stolypin period went down in Russian history as a terrible time of Black-Hundred terror.

The police was used to dissolve the first two Dumas; the finest sons and daughters of the working class, the peasantry and the intelligentsia were executed, imprisoned or exiled to Siberia. Advanced political parties, democratic public organisations and other progressive forces were brutally persecuted. A harsh military and political reign of terror was seen throughout the five years in which Stolypin was in power. Political reaction obscured the government's agrarian-economic measures, dooming them to failure.

Stolypin soon realised that punitive measures alone would not solve the problem. The situation had changed radically since the first reform, as had the correlation of class forces. The socio-economic contradictions were too great, and the opposing forces faced each other belligerently—the exploiter classes, on the one hand, and the growing numbers of workers, the awakened peasantry and other progressive forces, on the other. This became evident during the first Russian revolution. The Stolypin government was compelled to manoeuvre and adapt to the new conditions, using a policy of stick and carrot. Obviously, such a policy could not make for the successful implementation of a large-scale agrarian programme.

## 2. THE PEASANT BANK - THE MAIN LEVER OF STOLYPIN'S AGRARIAN POLICY

The Stolypin government counted on expanding the activity of the Peasant Bank (founded in 1882) as one of the most effective means of destroying the system of communal landownership, and supporting the new class of landowners. The founders intended it as a bank that would purchase landed estates and resell the land to the peasants, thus enlarging the peasant households and heightening their productivity. But the bank's activities were limited from the very start. The credit terms were too high for the buyers, and as a result the bank's operations developed very slowly. Its development was further hampered by the tsarist government's agrarian policy, which was made dual by the actions of the two political groups.

One group believed the bank's socio-economic role to be of primary importance and counted on it to enlarge the private ownership of land, to consolidate the landowners and to set the stage for annulling communal landownership. The other group believed in preserving the old land relations in the countryside and regarded the bank merely as a profit-making enterprise—a mediator in mortgages and credits playing a commercial role: purchasing and reselling landowners' land at ostensibly fair prices.

The government rejected the reformist role of the bank, and adopted the second variant, which was then presented to the peasantry as a "great boon". It should be noted that at first the peasants had high hopes, while there was unconcealed anxiety among landowners. However, soon everything fell into place. The highly touted "fair prices" and "unbiased" mediation worked against the peasants. It was soon clear that the bank served the landowners and brought enslavement and ruin to peasants.

The bank set extremely high prices for landowners' land, buying it first of all from high-ranking government officials. In many cases, the bank bought land that could not be cultivated or that was in the areas where the peasants had no need for it. This was done to suit the wishes of the landowners. Thus, one of the first estates to be purchased by the bank at a price of several million rubles was the estate of Count Ignatiev. It had very little arable land and a large number of ponds and lakes for fishing. There were many other similar instances. On the orders of Count Witte, Minister of Finance, the bank purchased the Saratov estate (41,804 dessiatines) of Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, Minister of the Court, for 3,500,252 rubles. Next, it purchased the Chernigov

estate of the former Minister of the Interior Durnovo (3,250 dessiatines) for 525,629 rubles, i.e. at close to 140 rubles per dessiatine.

But even on these favourable terms many landowners, especially those of the Black-Earth Area, were reluctant to sell their land to the bank. Taking advantage of the peasants' need for land, the high rentals, and the low cost of peasant labour, they did their utmost to obstruct the activities of the Peasant Bank. Suffice it to say that from 1883 to 1897 the peasants were only able to purchase two million dessiatines through the bank. Not until the turn of the century, when the landowners' mansions were being put to the torch by peasants all over the country, did the landowners flock to the bank and offer it their land. Naturally, the bank rendered immediate aid: from 1897 to 1902 it purchased 4.3 million dessiatines of landowners' land, raising the price of land still higher. Thus, the average price of one dessiatine purchased through the bank in 1896 was 45-52 rubles; by 1901 the price had risen to 91 rubles, and by 1902 to 108 rubles. This is proof of how zealously the bank protected the interests of the landowners.

Let us now see whether the bank helped the labouring peasantry and whether it satisfied the peasants' need for land. Certainly, the appearance of the Peasant Bank was an avenue to increasing peasants' holdings, but it was insufficient. Only a small group of kulaks, the rich peasants, increased their land with the aid of the bank, while the great mass of peasants gained nothing.

Apart from raising the price of land annually, the bank's credit terms were very high and hard for the peasants to meet. For instance, the loans amounted to not more than 60 per cent of the cost of the land purchased by the peasant and to 75 per cent as an exception, while the interest on the loans, not counting repayments, was 6.5 per cent and, including the repayments, from 7.5 to 8.5 per cent of the initial cost. Naturally, this was beyond the means of a poverty-stricken peasant. Many of the peasants who purchased land through the bank were soon ruined. They were unable to repay their loans and the interest, and were forced to apply to landowners or kulaks.

There was another way of purchasing land: through land societies and associations [*tovarishchestvo*.—*Tr.*], but here, too, most peasants suffered the same fate. Many peasant societies that had purchased land through the bank could not pay the instalments and interest on time, and since the terms were very rigid, the bank dispossessed them and auctioned off the land. In this way most of the land purchased by peasant societies from 1883 to 1902 was

confiscated and auctioned. As regards the associations, the land they purchased was rarely auctioned, as they were usually able to meet the terms of their loans. But the associations were chiefly of rich peasants, with poor or middle peasants rarely admitted.

In the 20 years of its existence, the Peasant Bank was instrumental in further ruining the peasants and entangling them in debts that made them still more dependent on landowners and kulaks. When buying land from the bank, the peasant naturally hoped to pay off his loan no matter what the difficulties and hardships. And when a payment was due he did his utmost to meet it and not lose his land. Often, he was obliged to borrow from the landowner or kulak, who charged him 12 to 24 per cent interest per annum, which was even more than the bank did.

Thus, the peasant found himself in debt to two or even three creditors: the bank, the landowner, and the usurer. In the end, after purchasing land, the peasant was left with staggering debts and a life of hopeless servitude, working off his debt to landowner or kulak. The price the peasants paid for the so-called Peasant Bank was one they could not afford. They overpaid the bank tremendous sums, from which the landowners profited greatly.<sup>1</sup>

But this was not all. As a result of the higher land prices peasants overpaid landowners large sums in rent. This meant that peasants who had not ventured to buy land through the bank, and rented it from landowners found themselves in difficult straits too. It was a vicious circle: lack of land forced the peasant to rent landowner's land, with rents increasing as a result of the rising demand; this led to new land price increases, which caused rents to rise still higher. In this way the bank did the landowners another good turn.

Al. Lvov found that "In many areas rents were raised as a result of the rise in land prices and this latter came about as a result of land being purchased by the bank or through the bank. According to government data, rents were raised from 7 to 12 rubles, per dessiatine from 1890 to 1900 (on average for the country). However, in many gubernias rents were doubled and even tripled in the last 15 years. It is now frequent to find in some gubernias rents of 20-25 or even 30 rubles per dessiatine under winter crops. The peasants annually rent up to 25 mln dessiatines.

<sup>1</sup> Following are pertinent data: from 1897 to 1902 the peasants purchased 4,300,000 dessiatines through the bank for 338,997,000 rubles, i.e. an average of 86 rubles per dessiatine. If the land had been purchased at pre-1895 prices (52 rubles per dessiatine), it would have cost them 223,598,000 rubles, i.e. the overpayment amounted to 115,339,000 rubles.

If, as a result of rising prices, they annually overpaid on the average only one ruble per dessiatine, they have overpaid 250 million rubles in the past ten years. If the overpayment was two rubles, they have overpaid 500 million rubles. Add this to the 115 million rubles overpaid to landowners when purchasing their land, and you will have a sum of 365 to 615 million rubles. And this only over a ten-year period! This brief passage about the bank clearly shows whom it has helped and whom it is still helping. Obviously, the bank has helped none but the landowners and brought but ruin to the peasants.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the activities of the bank did not pass without a trace as far as the peasants were concerned: it dispelled their illusions about help from the tsar and his government. The oppressive role of the bank was an important reason behind the growth of a strong agrarian movement during the first Russian revolution. The peasantry raised its voice against this usurious establishment in the numerous resolutions of peasant meetings and in the speeches of the peasant deputies to the First and Second Dumas. In the end, anti-peasant activities of the Peasant Bank turned against its initiators. It added oil to the flames of the peasant movement.

That is why the ruling classes had to seek a way out of the severe agrarian crisis by radically changing their agrarian policy and pacifying the rebellious peasantry. The Stolypin government, bent on solving the agrarian problem, had to change course, but could not, naturally, destroy the old agrarian relations. Stolypin, a henchman of the landowners, was well aware that the Peasant Bank was a tool of his class, and did his utmost to expand its activities. Examining the further activity of the bank from class positions, we see that Stolypin did not introduce any important changes, but broadened its scope and laid more emphasis on socio-economic tasks, i.e. tasks which one of the political groups had set forth at the time the bank was founded. But this did not prevent Stolypin from sustaining the usurious functions of the bank. During his rule the bank became an instrument of unprecedented land speculation, ensuing tremendous gains for landowners, tsarist officials, and usurers. In fact, the Peasant Bank gained first place among similar establishments in the rest of the world for the amount of land purchased and resold.

Under the new conditions, the bank was to facilitate the disintegration of the peasant commune, ensure the development of a farmstead and holding system, and consolidate landed property

<sup>1</sup> Al. Lvov, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

in the hands of a new class, the owners of land. To this end, the Stolypin government changed the bank's credit terms, placing it on a par with the Nobles' Bank, i.e. allowing it to grant loans of from 90 to 100 per cent of the cost of the land at an interest rate of 4.5 per cent. Next, the bank was granted the right to act not only as a mediator, as it had previously, but as an independent buyer and purveyor of land. And, finally, besides having the right to purchase landed estates the bank could now buy all privately-owned land and have land holdings for resale to peasants. To enlarge the bank's holdings of land, the government turned over to it appanage and, later, public land that had previously been rented out.

This is what the government relied on to form the Peasant Bank's holdings of 19.5 million dessiatines, including: 9.8 million dessiatines offered for sale by landowners, 7.6 million dessiatines of public land and 2.1 million dessiatines of appanage land. Naturally, this could have mitigated the peasants' land-hunger. But actually, these holdings existed only on paper and the bank never had so much at its disposal. The controversial Stolypin agrarian policy, which worked to the advantage of landowners—and this was evident at every step—influenced the activities of the bank. The following table shows the complete dependency of the Peasant Bank on the landowners.<sup>1</sup>

Years	Bank operations over five years, in thous. dessiatines			
	Bought by the bank from landowners	Bought by peasants		
		from the bank	through the bank	total
1906	1,144	40	483	523
1907	1,520	191	742	933
1908	573	332	687	1,019
1909	173	551	676	1,227
1910	170	763	787	1,550
Total . . . . .	3,580	1,877	3,375	5,252

<sup>1</sup> N. Oganovsky, *Revolutsia naoborot (Razrusheniye obshchiny)* (Revolution in Reverse [Destruction of the Commune]), Petrograd, 1917, p. 9 (in Russian).



This table shows the basic tendencies in the bank's land operations. During the years when panic gripped the landowners (1906-07) they offered more land for sale and the bank unfailingly bought it on terms that were profitable to them. During these two years the bank bought 2,664,000 dessiatines. At the same time, the peasants, hoping to receive land through the "general redistribution", abstained from buying the landowners' land. During these two years they bought only 1,456,000 dessiatines, of which only 231,000 dessiatines were bought from the bank. In the three years following the suppression of the peasant movement, the landowners, on the contrary, sharply cut down the sale of their land, while the peasants' demand for land increased. From 1908 to 1910 the landowners sold only 916,000 dessiatines of land, while, during the same period, the peasants bought 3,796,000 dessiatines.

With the aid of the Peasant Bank the Stolypin government tried to dispel the panic that spread among the landowners with the rise of the agrarian movement. It guaranteed them inviolability of their land and pledged to satisfy the great demand for the land that was offered for sale. And the government fulfilled its promise. It kept its word about maintaining high land prices. This made it possible for the landowners to raise the rent on land and thus keep the peasants in their former state of complete dependency.

Now the bank bought up the landowners' land at 124 rubles a dessiatine instead of the 52 rubles in 1895. The bank bought large estates belonging to high officials at prices ranging from 138 to 151 rubles a dessiatine. During a two-year period (1905-07), the land price increase alone gave the landowners an extra over 160 million rubles from the bank. That means that if the bank had been able to create a land fund of 19.5 million dessiatines the extra payments alone would have amounted to close to 1,500 million rubles. The well-known agrarian economist Mertvago estimated that if the bank were to have bought land at existing prices, the peasants would have had to pay 6,600 million rubles for the 55 million dessiatines of landowners' land that were needed to do away with the peasants' land-hunger. A staggering sum!

The question naturally arises: why did the peasants go on buying land if their purchases of land through the bank were both unprofitable and ruinous? [Firstly,] one must bear in mind that the peasantry of Russia was no longer a homogeneous class. Under the impact of the development of bourgeois relations it fell apart into two socially-heterogeneous groups. That is why their degree of in-

terest in the land operations of the bank varied. The rich peasantry did indeed profit from the bank's activities being the main buyer of landowners' land through the bank. This was a profitable operation, because, (first,) the rich peasants had sufficient capital which they could put into circulation without risk. By acquiring and exploiting new land they stood to gain new capital. (Second,) the village rich could later either rent this land out at higher prices to the peasants who had insufficient land or else make use of the free labour of the peasants, most of whom were in debt to the very same rich peasants; (third,) the village rich were furthering their own class interest by buying up land. They knew that with the aid of the bank, the process of transferring the landowners' land to them and thus consolidating the peasant bourgeoisie was proceeding slowly but surely.

As concerns the main mass of the peasantry, there could be no question of profit from purchasing land from the bank. The peasants embarked on these risky land purchases out of hunger and want and for lack of any other possibility of relief, but certainly not from a desire to seek gain.

The peasants, besides, were forced to buy or rent land, because the landowners' land surrounded the villages in such a way that the landowners could by fines and various taxes collect more from them than the land was worth; and, finally, in buying land, the peasants tried their utmost to free themselves from the landowners' bondage, to rid themselves of the slave payment they received for tilling the very same landowner land.

(We see then that the so-called free landownership introduced by Stolypin gave the peasant masses the one right and "freedom" of ceasing to be peasants and of being ruined. This was further aided by the fact that usurers and black marketeers who had embarked on the purchase and repurchase of land on a grand scale were now taking an active part in the land operations. By taking advantage of the peasants' need, these smart operators grew rich on all sorts of speculative deals. Now the peasants found themselves face to face with three exploiters: the landowners, the kulaks, and the usurers.

During the Stolypin period land speculation grew to unheard-of proportions, especially after the law of 15 November 1906 on the mortgaging of allotted land was passed. As a result, the peasants' allotted land and not landowner, appanage and public land, became an object of market speculation. This law abrogated all limitations concerning the purchase and sale of the peasants' allotted lands. The bank was allowed to grant loans against mortgaged

allotted land only on the condition that the peasant left the commune.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, if the bank was formerly able to take away the peasant's bought land and auction it if he was late in his payments, the new law gave the bank the right to do the same with his allotted land. This then was the direction in which the bank's activities were developing and these were the class interests it defended. No wonder that its prestige fell steadily in the eyes of the working peasantry. It was becoming obvious that the bank could in no way relieve their plight. In order to prove this we shall cite data on the displacement of the bank's land fund and the land shortages in the gubernias<sup>2</sup>:

From this table we see that the bank land fund was divided up in such a way as to give the gubernias with the greatest number of

Land shortages in gubernias	Number of households with insuf- ficient land, thous.	Bank land, thous. of dess.	Number of dess. of bank land per one house- hold with in- sufficient land
8 gubernias with over 30 per cent of peasants with insufficient land . .	1,447	588	0.4
10 gubernias with 20-30 per cent of such peasants . . . . .	667	974	1.5
13 gubernias with 10-20 per cent . . . . .	569	1,588	2.8
18 gubernias with under 10 per cent . . . . .	145	1,987	13.7

<sup>1</sup> Loans were granted, first, to pay for the allotments given to peasants who were resettling in Siberia; second, to pay additional sums when purchasing landlord estates; third, in changing over from communal landownership to private landownership to cover the cost of the apportioned land and resettlement to holdings or farmsteads. The loans were from 40 to 60 rubles per every hundred rubles of the cost of the land, as appraised by the Peasant Bank. If repayment of loans was delayed the mortgaged allotted lands were taken from the peasants and auctioned. On the surface, the Stolypin law looked like a godsend to the peasants: no sooner would a peasant leave the commune and mortgage his allotment to the bank than he was eligible for a loan, to be used as additional payment in purchasing the landlord estates. However, rising to this bait, the peasant, as a rule, lost not only the land he purchased, but his allotted land as well.

<sup>2</sup> See N. Oganovsky, op. cit., p. 10.

land-hungry households the least amount of bank land, and vice versa.

With the aid of the Peasant Bank the Stolypin government did much to strengthen the position of the reactionary landowners, added to the impoverishment and hastened the ruin of the peasantry by turning the communal and allotted land into an object of unprecedented speculation and usury. At the same time, the bank was responsible for the tremendous profits gained by the well-to-do peasants, as it aided in the development of capitalist landownership and the growth of the class of kulaks.

### 3. STOLYPIN'S RESETTLEMENT POLICY AND THE RESULTS OF THE CULTIVATION OF EASTERN LANDS

As the Peasant Bank was expanding its activities, the resettlement of the peasants came to the fore in the agrarian policy of the Stolypin government. In his many speeches Stolypin invariably said: "Anyone who wants more land should buy the landowners' land through the Peasant Bank or resettle in Siberia." We have already shown how the bank supplied landowner land to the peasants. Now we shall see what they received from the Stolypin government by resettling in Siberia.

Resettlement in the eastern regions of the country was nothing new. It had been going on for many decades, and had been quite successful by the beginning of the 20th century. The process was spurred by the abolition of serfdom and the growing network of railways. That is why towards the end of the last century a more or less mass resettlement on new land was under way, first and foremost in Siberia.

The natural resources of this undeveloped territory and its vastness attracted landless peasants from Central Russia. The peasants' wish to resettle in Siberia increased greatly when the Siberian railway was put into operation in 1893. The government put no obstacles in their way. In 1894, for the first time, it allocated 1,595,000 dessiatines for new settlers, and another 1,700,000 dessiatines in 1900. In eleven years (1894-1905) a total of 11.5 million dessiatines was allocated to 635,000 settler families.

These could have been impressive figures, especially if they had been true. But in many cases the allocated land existed only on paper: no one had surveyed or checked it. Often land set aside for settlers turned out to be untillable or already given over to other

settlers. That is why many arriving settlers found themselves with no land and were compelled, now completely ruined, to return. Suffice it to say that in the eight years from 1885 to 1893 only four families out of every hundred returned, with the total number of families that returned standing at 2,300. In the six-year period from 1897 to 1902, however, a quarter of new settlers returned, with the total now at 28,300 families. They came back to terrible hardships. Having lost their property, home and allotment, they went to work for the landowners or kulaks for the lowest possible wage.

The lot of those who stayed in the new land was not much better. They lived in dug-outs or huts and had to fell trees and root out the tree stumps before tilling the land. The settlers did this themselves and at their own expense, with no help or support from the government or the local authorities. Not all survived these trials. Many, reaching complete exhaustion, abandoned their plots and hired themselves out to the local kulaks, thus acquiring new exploiters. As a result, the number of resettlers in Siberia began to diminish. In 1896 there were 196,000 resettlers, in 1901 the figure went down to 86,000 and in 1902 and in 1903 to 77,000 annually.

The reason was to be found in the feudal relations that greatly retarded the country's economic and social development, as the case of resettlement, interfered with throughout by the reactionary landowners, shows clearly. Contrary to national interests, the latter kept the peasants back by force in overcrowded Central Russia. Reluctant to loose this cheap labour force, and fearing a decline in land prices and rents if the rural population moved to distant lands, landowners lobbied for agrarian laws that would make it practically impossible for the peasants to migrate. The law of 6 June 1904, for example, which formally recognised "freedom" of resettlement, set conditions that reduced it practically to naught. The law greatly curtailed the apportionment of the land fund for new settlers. In each case, resettlement was granted only with the permission of the head of the Zemstvo.

In addition to the various restrictions set by the government and the local authorities, the peasants were held back by all sorts of obligations and by arrears. Finally, the commune with its surviving system of collective responsibility, a relic of serfdom, bound the peasant to his pauper's allotment and condemned him to slave-labour on the landowners' estates. In short, resettlement was held back by the absence of developed capitalist relations in agriculture and by the reactionary agrarian policy of the landowner-

monarchist government. That is why in opposing the oppressive survivals of their former serfdom, the peasants demanded new terms of resettlement and rational use of the new land. This demand was voiced strongly in the Duma, in the peasants' instructions, in their commune decisions, and in the revolutionary agrarian movement. And Stolypin did not fail to make use of this in his agrarian policy.

The Stolypin government understood the economic side of the resettlement problem, but saw it as an escape valve in combatting the revolutionary sentiment among the villagers. Stolypin counted on resettlement to solve two problems at once: on the one hand, he would dispatch a large part of the peasant poor to Siberia and thus rid himself of the politically unreliable and easily-aroused peasant masses and, on the other, protect the landowners' estates and strengthen the position of the kulaks.

Having recognised the "freedom" of resettlement, the Stolypin government presented it as one of the main points of its agrarian policy. Advertising resettlement to eastern regions of the country, it promised the peasants a life of milk and honey and said it would provide for all their needs in the new land. And, indeed, judging by the laws passed by the government, the peasants could expect that now, at last, the barriers that had artificially restrained resettlement, would be lowered. The government announced that it was abolishing restrictions on resettlement, was increasing the land fund in Siberia and Central Asia, would grant financial aid and benefits to resettlers, in particular for railway fares and purchase of implements, etc. To supervise resettlement and carry on surveys, the government established a resettlement office.

The Altai Territory and the steppes of Kirghizia were opened to new settlers. To further its resettlement programme, the government sent two boundary expeditions to Kirghizia and Siberia. They were to determine the size of the new land and to reduce land use by local population in favour of the new settlers. As a result, land given over to the new settlers was set at 30-32 million dessiatines (22 million dessiatines in Kirghizia and 8-10 million dessiatines in the Altai Territory).

Although Stolypin stuck to the class positions of his predecessors, resettlement in the eastern regions of the most destitute part of the peasantry, whose revolutionary spirit worried Stolypin most, reached its highest level during his stay in power. While the middle-income peasants were once the majority among new settlers, as "the rich peasant had no need to go and the poor peasant had nothing to go on", the situation changed: some grants,



a reduction in railway fares, and free exit from the commune paved the way for the resettlement of the peasant poor, whose percentage among the new settlers had risen considerably. Thus, of the total number of resettlers in 1898-1904 in Kharkov Gubernia, 52 per cent were landless peasants or peasants with insufficient land (up to four dessiatines per household), while in 1906-08 the number rose to 72.8 per cent; in Chernigov Gubernia the average size of a peasant allotment was 8.2 dessiatines, while those who resettled in 1906-08 had 3.9 dessiatines. In most uyezds, three-fourths of the new settlers had less than three dessiatines of land per household.

Stolypin organised the resettlement movement in all the gubernias of Central Russia. The stream of new settlers increased at an unheard-of rate, spreading to new districts and setting in motion great masses of the peasantry. There was a time when specialists considered it impossible to resettle more than 200,000 persons beyond the Urals. Now their figure was dwarfed. By 1907, as many as 427,000 settlers had moved across the Urals; in 1908 their number was 665,000 and in 1909 it was 619,000, bringing the three-year total to over 1,700,000. The government press saw this as the greatest victory of Stolypin's agrarian programme.

However, having set the peasant masses in motion, the government could not cope with the flow of people streaming eastwards, and was twice compelled to call a halt. As could have been expected, the surge of resettlement was bound to exhaust itself, for the government's material resources were too small to provide for such an overwhelming movement. Beginning with 1909, resettlement began to ebb, and the first signs of panic and despair among the peasantry appeared. Resettlement gave way to an overwhelming flood of people moving in the opposite direction. This was a threatening flow of ruined, angered and poverty-stricken people. The table on the next page shows the resettlement in the six years of Stolypin's rule:<sup>1</sup>

These figures show that Stolypin's resettlement policy collapsed. Of the 2,333,200 settlers who moved beyond the Urals in the six-year period, 368,600 were forced to return. They had no roofs over their heads nor any means of subsistence. Still, these returnees were more fortunate than those who had lacked the courage to set out on the long return journey and remained in their new place of settlement. Judging by descriptions of contemporaries, there were over 700,000 destitute migrants in Siberia in 1911, all of

<sup>1</sup> See N. Oganovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 12.



Years	All settlers (minus scouts), in thous.		
	Moved beyond the Urals	Returned	Returnees per 100 settlers
1906	139.1	13.7	9.8
1907	427.3	27.2	6.4
1908	664.8	45.1	6.8
1909	619.3	83.3	13.3
1910	316.2	114.9	36.4
1911 (through September 21)	166.5	84.4	50.2

them in dire circumstances. On the whole, over one million, i.e. nearly 50 per cent of all settlers, were ruined and poverty-stricken. That was the result of the "freedom" of resettlement under Stolypin's rule.

Stolypin's resettlement policy amounted to agrarian adventurism, an open and direct deception of the working peasantry. The Stolypin government knew that there was too little good land in the southern steppelands of Western Siberia to provide for the great flood of settlers. The allocated funds were insufficient for even the settlers' fare. From the very start the government intentionally doomed the settlers to risk and privations.

Most of the settlers who headed for Western Siberia found themselves without land and were forced to move north and into the dense forestlands of Eastern Siberia in search of a livelihood. They could only count on receiving forest plots located in remote, uninhabited regions far removed from any roads. Many of the settlers found themselves completely isolated from the local population; they began their new lives by building dug-outs and huts, clearing the forested land, digging wells and ponds, and laying roads. Obviously, only those who had the means and the strength coped with this job. They were the ones who stayed on, but there were too few of them, for most of the new settlers were poor, had lost their bearings, and either returned or hired themselves out as farmhands to local rich peasants.

Continuing its policy of consolidating the kulaks and "depeasantising" the villages, the Stolypin government took new measures for intensifying this process. First, it decided, beginning with 1909, to cease free parcelling of land in the more convenient regions of Western Siberia, and to offer the plots for sale to the

rich peasants. Second, it decided not to grant any more privileges to new settlers or to give them loans. It stopped advertising resettlement and focussed its attention on organising land cultivation by old settlers, helping to divide their land into farmsteads and holdings.

These new anti-peasant acts unmasked the class nature of Stolypin's resettlement policy. Now in Siberia, as in Central Russia, capitalist landowners, the owners of farmsteads and holdings, were growing strong. Having mushroomed as a result of the anti-peasant land reform, this new class was to become the bulwark of the Stolypin government and the entire bourgeois-monarchist system, but, at the same time, throughout Russia another new class was rapidly evolving: a village proletariat that had partaken of the "joys" of the Stolypin resettlement programme. This numerous class was not only a great reserve labour force, but also a serious political force.

(Thus, Stolypin was able, with the aid of the Peasant Bank, to some extent to tear the peasants away from the village commune, and deprive them of allotments. But his resettlement scheme brought about the complete impoverishment of the Russian peasants, turning them into homeless and landless proletarians. Such was the tortuous and harsh fate that Stolypin had prepared for the peasant by means of reactionary methods implanting capitalist landownership in Russia.)

#### 4. THE REASONS BEHIND THE COLLAPSE OF THE STOLYPIN PLAN FOR LAND USE

Stolypin's agrarian programme was full of severe social and economic contradictions which at any moment could have erupted like a mighty volcano. The results of the government's resettlement credit and bank policies were an indication. However, his land use policy turned out to be still more vulnerable, and it was the axis of the entire agrarian programme.

How did the Stolypin agrarian machine churn on without its "central axis" for the first three years?

[First,] in launching his agrarian reform, Stolypin could not be sure of success. He understood full well that in order to do away with the country's extreme agricultural backwardness and to create a new land use system tremendous capital and great organisational and agricultural forces would be needed, none of which his government possessed. Suffice it to say that in 1907 there were only

600 surveyors in the entire country. The creation of new types of land use called for the full participation and help of the peasantry, without whom nothing could be accomplished. However, the Stolypin government not only did not seek the support of this mighty force, but feared its participation.

Second, Stolypin was aware that his agrarian reform would inevitably broaden the class struggle and increase the existing socio-economic contradictions, and that economic difficulties would be aggravated by political, but he saw no way out of this dilemma. The landowners and the peasant bourgeoisie supported the Stolypin government's resettlement and bank policies, but the interests of these two classes clashed over its land use policy. Besides, there was now yet another contradiction: the opposition of the working peasantry not only to the landowners, but to the new class of farmstead owners.

And third, political corruption riddled the monarchist state apparatus and threatened the agrarian reform. Embezzlement of state property, bribery and all sorts of official abuse had grown to unheard-of dimensions. The bulk of the national income still went to maintain the royal family, the police, the army and government officials. Great sums went abroad as payments on loans and the growing interest. The Russo-Japanese War was a severe financial blow to the government, which could not defray its costs. It received 1,742 million rubles in loans over a two-year period: 850 million rubles in 1905 and 892 million rubles in 1906. Russia found itself bound hand and foot; its economy was in shambles. Naturally, there could be no hope of allocations for land use under these circumstances.

All this made Stolypin uncertain and confused, forcing him to manoeuvre and to adapt his new agricultural plan to the existing conditions. He was most afraid of his "central axis" and kept putting off its implementation. The Stolypin government started its reform not with land use, its main element, but on the principle that "the main thing is to start; who knows where and how it will all end".

#### *A. The Consequences of the Stolypin Government's Anti-Commune Measures*

The Stolypin agrarian reform began with breaking up the communal structure of peasant life and abolishing the egalitarian reallocation of land.

Over a nine-year period (1907-15) a total of 2,449,000 peasants (24.1 per cent) withdrew voluntarily from the commune in 40 gubernias of European Russia, and another 1,698,000 (16.7 per cent) were forced to withdraw. Hence, the total number of peasants adopting private ownership of land reached 4,147,000 (out of 10,176,000), or 40.8 per cent of all commune members in the above gubernias.

The government's hope of quickly abolishing the communal system fell through. The strong campaign it launched to destroy the centuries-old system of peasant communes proved ineffective. Though doomed by the very course of economic development, they strongly resisted the coercive measures against them. The anti-peasant resettlement and bank operations undermined the peasants' faith in the Stolypin reform and forced them to seek help elsewhere. Far from disintegrating the peasant commune consolidated its forces. This is seen from the analysis of the social elements that left the commune and those that kept it together.

Statistical data shows that the largest group to withdraw from the commune were ruined peasants with insufficient land, many of whom had left the village long before. The first category was made up of: a) city dwellers (workers, artisans, etc.) who had formerly rented out their allotments but who now took advantage of the chance to sell their land and hastened to do so; b) peasants who were able to migrate to new land after selling their allotments; c) non-working members of the peasant commune (the elderly, the orphans and widows) who had been renting out their allotments and were now able to get rid of them altogether. This added up to almost half of those who withdrew from the communes.

The second category was made up of the most well-to-do peasants who had long felt cramped within the commune. Now they broke out of it completely. Though this category was small in number, it was the largest land-purchaser, buying up most of the land offered for sale.

Thus, two opposing groups had withdrawn from the commune: the peasant poor who had long before left the land and were now getting rid of their allotments, and the kulaks. The first withdrew from the commune in order to completely sever their ties with the land, and the others to increase their property. Obviously, the withdrawal of these groups did not in the least weaken the communes.

The solid core of the commune was made up of middle peasants who, while not risking the loss of their land, tried to adopt new, progressive methods in order to raise the productivity of their land within the framework of the commune. It should be noted that

this category of peasants often bought the allotments which were put up for sale by the peasant poor. These strips never exceeded two or three dessiatines, and the middle peasants could afford to purchase them. Besides, these strips of land were easily attached to their own.

The destruction of the commune did not take place where the Stolypin government had wanted. It fell apart, first, in those regions where the commune had long since disintegrated, and had given way to farmsteads and holdings, and where the stratification of the peasantry had gone a long way without the Stolypin legislation.

Such were the western and north-western territories of Russia, i. e. those regions in which, under the influence of the West European countries, the farmstead and holding system of landownership had taken hold before the reform.

As for Central, North, and North-East Russia, there the peasants clung to the commune, and the new legislation was unable to destroy it quickly. In many communes of these regions, even after the members had withdrawn, the system of egalitarian reallocation remained. Though the conversion to private landownership was taking place on a wide scale, it proceeded not by the apportioning of entire settlements, but by the withdrawal of individual householders, quite often against the will of the commune members. In view of this, their struggle against the owners of farmsteads and holdings was especially sharp here, reaching its peak in 1917.

The main argument of the peasants in defence of the communal system was land-hunger and the extortionist nature of the Stolypin reform. This is what forced the peasants of these regions to support the communal system which, while not saving them from ruin and impoverishment, still provided some guarantee against loss of their land and home. It was a vicious circle: land-hunger tied the peasants to the community and the commune, in turn, increased their land-hunger. The peasants understood this, but they also knew that the Stolypin anti-commune laws would not offer them anything better, for the bank and resettlement measures had deprived thousands of peasants of their land and home, turning them into vagrants. This is the only explanation for the sharp decline, beginning with the second half of 1909, of bank land operations and of the migration to Siberia and, at the same time, for the peasants' reluctance to withdraw from the communes.

Thus, the first stage of the agrarian reform did not produce the results Stolypin had counted on. Moreover, these results were diametrically opposed to the planned tasks.

First, the government counted on destroying at one blow the communes in those regions where they were the strongest. In reality, things turned out differently: the communes ceased to exist in those regions where they did not have deep roots and existed only formally. There was no need to destroy such communes: they died a natural death. As for Central Russia, its communes continued to function as before.

Second, the government counted on the economically strong elements leaving the commune first: these were to constitute the nucleus of the new class of landowners and serve as a reliable support of the government. However, things again turned out differently: most of the peasants who withdrew were poor and took advantage of this chance of getting rid of their allotments. As a result, the land they sold was purchased, as a rule, by kulaks, speculators and other parasitic elements who found it profitable to rent out their newly-acquired land.

Third, instead of raising agriculture and achieving economic progress, the government brought complete disorganisation and disorder to the rural economy. Such were the results of the first stage of the Stolypin agrarian reform.

### *B. The Barrenness of the Stolypin Farmstead and Holding System of Landownership*

What were the results of the second stage of the reform? Starting with the end of 1909, the Stolypin government focussed its attention on realising its plan of land use, which called for a wide network of farmsteads and holdings based on the individual farming system. Two establishments were entrusted to carry out this plan: the Peasant Bank which was in charge of the organisation of land use on privately-owned lands it had purchased and then sold to the peasants, and the gubernia and uyezd land commissions charged with carrying out land use measures on the allotted peasant lands. Thus, the government's plan was being carried out along two lines: individual land use (farmsteads) and land use by small groups (holdings).

Statistical data show that by 1917 a total of 1,317,320 owners of farmsteads and holdings received 12,777,108 dessiatines of allotted lands.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. N. Pershin, *Uchastkovoye zemlepol'zovaniye v Rossii* (Plot Land Use in Russia), Moscow, 1922, p. 8 (in Russian).

As for the correlation between farmsteads and holdings, the latter were evidently more numerous. Even on the bank-owned land in the arid regions of the agricultural Centre and South-East, five out of every six plots were allotted for holdings. In all, the farmsteads possessed 28 per cent of all bank-owned land and from 10 to 17.5 per cent of all allotted land. The following gubernias had the largest number of farmsteads: Taurida Gubernia—93.3 per cent; Pskov Gubernia—82.8 per cent; Minsk Gubernia—63.4 per cent; and Volhyn Gubernia—56.8 per cent.

But this was only the numerical side of the matter. The new land use system brought no important changes to Russia's system of landownership. Numerous official sources show that the government never did succeed in creating a unified system of land use. Even on those allotments that were under the supervision of government offices, the farmstead and holding system was far from perfect. In many areas this new type of land use was purely formal in nature and did not reflect the true state of affairs, because the newly-allotted farmsteads and holdings remained mostly untenanted, while the owners of the farmsteads and holdings preferred to live in their villages. The difficulties they would have to surmount if they moved out were too great.

(All this proved that the Stolypin government was completely unprepared to carry out a plan of such magnitude. The peasants were interested in a different kind of agrarian development, one that would give them the right to land and labour. The landowner-oriented agrarian reform predetermined the downfall of the new programme of land use. Now let us examine in detail the concrete reasons for the downfall of the farmstead and holding system in the major agricultural regions of the country.

The first reason was connected with the land question, which the Stolypin agrarian reform could not solve. "Land-hunger" oppressed both the owners of farmsteads and of holdings. The best land, the meadows, pastures and watering places remained in the hands of the big landowners, the tsar's high officials, the monasteries and the churches, and surrounded the peasants' land in a way that made it impossible to establish correct boundaries and to conveniently distribute the plots. No wonder that in many cases even the farmsteads did not consist of a single plot. Under these conditions, with the field in one place, the meadow in another, and the pasture in a third, the farmstead system of landownership lost all sense.

Besides, the farmsteads and holdings were mostly small in size, and it was generally recognised that an insufficient number of

allotted plots was responsible for their unsatisfactory organisation.

The second reason was the lack of even minimal sources of water supply, thus excluding the possibility of setting up the farmstead and holding system. This question was of vital importance, for in Russia many agricultural regions constantly suffered from droughts. Even Stolypin stressed on more than one occasion that "the farmstead resettlement programme depends entirely on the water supply situation". But his government ignored this important question. It did not even have a more or less acceptable working plan, to say nothing of providing any large subsidies. That is why the owners of farmsteads and holdings could only count on the primitive wells they themselves could dig when settling on their new plots. There was no question of irrigation canals, land reclamation or similar projects. Clearly, under these circumstances the farmsteads and holdings were not only unable to develop, they could not even exist. Even the official government bodies were forced to admit this.

And, finally, the third reason was the lack of roads, the nearly complete isolation of farmsteads and holdings from trade and cultural centres, and lack of communication among themselves, all of which placed them in a position of economic isolation and alienation.

All these reasons taken together forced many peasants who had withdrawn from communes to remain in their original villages, only moving to their farmsteads and holdings the outbuildings in which they lived during the farming season. Not wishing to risk ruin, the peasants preferred another, more profitable way, that of many-plot ownership. The kulaks who, besides their farmsteads and holdings, owned small scattered plots they had bought from other peasants, were especially interested in this. It would have been unprofitable for them to have had all their land in one place, as under existing conditions, it was easier to profit from plots that were scattered all over a field, since they could be rented out to a greater number of peasants and at higher rates. Close-lying plots enabled them to set up fences along pastures and cattle tracks, and to charge the peasants for using them, just as the big landowners had done.

The Stolypin government was clearly unsuccessful in its attempt to introduce a new system of land use based on the farmstead system as in Western Europe. In the West, and especially in America, farmsteads were established chiefly where there were large tracts of compactly situated land; where a water-supply system already



existed, with a large network of irrigation canals, reservoirs and various types of wells satisfying both the needs of each household and of watering the fields; where various types of roads had been built, connecting the farms with cultural and trade centres, thus promoting the growth of commodity-producing farms, broad exchange, and co-operation in agricultural production.

Agriculture in Russia needed just such decisive economic changes. However, the Stolypin government obviously neglected these vital, progressive factors. Its reactionary policy led Russia to a dead-end, causing a complete disorganisation of the villages. As a result, instead of the expected unified and clear-cut system of landownership, there were now many forms of land use: landowner, commune, household, farmstead, holding and capitalist. This was a more confusing hodge-podge than had ever existed anywhere. Russia found itself in a drawn-out agricultural crisis from which it did not recover until the Great October Socialist Revolution.

## 5. THE INFLUENCE OF THE FIRST RUSSIAN REVOLUTION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIA'S AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVE FORCES

The first Russian revolution, though failing to solve the agrarian question, did not, however, leave it in its former state. Objectively the agrarian reform the ruling classes were forced to adopt speeded up the development of capitalist farming. The process was accompanied not only by a definitive social change in the villages, but by noticeable qualitative changes in agricultural production, namely: raising the level of land cultivation, using more modern implements and machinery, increasing the areas under industrial and commercial crops, growth of the commercial value of marketable produce, and expanding the agricultural market.

All signs pointed to increased technical and economic progress in agricultural production as a result of the expansion of capitalist forms of agriculture. In the first three years of the Stolypin reform, due to the havoc in the economy and the forms of land use, there were no marked changes in agriculture, whereas the following five-year period saw a strong economic revival; beginning with 1909, agriculture in Russia began to gradually increase its rate of output. If we take the total grain harvest of 1895-1900 as

100 per cent, then by 1901-1906 the figure was 114.5 per cent, and by 1907-1912—as much as 128.8 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

The increase in grain production brought an expansion of the home and export markets, which lifted the peasant economy out of the isolation of subsistence farming. Between 1900 and 1912 the amount of grain transported rose from 777 million to 1,200 million poods. Russia had emerged on the world market.

In addition to grain, the products of livestock farming also began to reach the foreign market. Increased exports of agricultural output were accompanied by increased imports of farm machinery and fertilisers.

The market was thus reorganising agriculture. Under its influence specialised market crops and even whole districts specialising for the market began to emerge. The Volga country and the North Caucasus, for example, started producing high-grade wheat that won a reputation far beyond the borders of Russia; the area under sunflowers expanded in the south-east, while maize spread in the south-west; the western and north-western districts specialised in flax; Turkestan expanded the production of cotton and the Crimea developed grapes.

As the number of large-scale capitalist farms increased, more and more branches of agriculture, such as beet-growing, tobacco, vegetables and fruit, were opened up. In the seven years before the war the areas under industrial crops increased as follows: potatoes 20.3 per cent, sugar beet 61, sunflower 61, cotton 111.6, fodder grass 79.3, tobacco 18.5, rice, hops and rape 24.2 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

Under the influence of the market a clearly discernible regional specialisation occurred in stock farming with the consequent introduction of fodder-grass and root-crop cultivation and an expansion of the fodder reserve.

The home market brought farming closer to industry, while the foreign market gave Russian farming a foot-hold in the world economy. The following figures illustrate the development of this process.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Selskokhoziaistvennyi promysel v Rossii* (Agricultural industry in Russia), Petrograd, 1914, p. 121 (diagram 4) (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> See N. D. Kondratyev, N. P. Oganovsky, *Perspektivy razvitiya selskogo khoziaistva SSSR* (Prospects for the Development of Agriculture in the USSR), Issue 1, Moscow, 1924, p. 57 (in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> See P. I. Popov, *Selskoye khoziaistvo Soyuza respublik* (The Agriculture of the Union of Republics), Moscow-Leningrad, 1924, p. 5 (in Russian).

**A. Relation of Agriculture to Industry**  
(in millions of prewar gold rubles)

As supplier	1912-13	As consumer	1912-13
Food products	1,040.4	Consumer goods	1,837.4
Raw materials	687.0	Instruments and means of production	316.4

**B. Relation of Agriculture to World Market**

As exporter	1912-13	As consumer	1912-13
Food products	823.6	Imported instruments and means of production	49.6
Raw materials	223.3		

From these data it can be seen that there was an extremely active process of exchange both on the home and foreign markets, which naturally tended to boost the Russian economy in general. The balance of exchange between agriculture and industry was particularly favourable. Admittedly, this balance was less advantageous for Russia's agriculture on the world market, but even so it continued to make progress.

Let us consider first of all the effect of the market in changing the pattern of grain crop production. The basic grain crop for which peasant Russia was famous was rye. This crop was primarily suited to the needs of a subsistence economy and least of all suited to market production. Rye was mainly produced for internal consumption, while on the world market there was hardly any demand for it. Between 1907 and 1912, out of a total harvest of 3,921 million poods of rye only 226 million, i. e. 5.8 per cent, were exported abroad. Naturally, this could not fail to have its effects. Although the total rye harvest did not decrease, its share among the other crops noticeably declined, as we shall show later.

Similar tendencies were to be observed with the second peasant crop—oats. This crop was also intended mainly for internal consumption. Its movements on the home and foreign markets in the period from 1895 to 1912 remained unchanged. In 1912 they

accounted for 133 million poods out of a total harvest of 764 million, or 17 per cent.

Marketable crops, particularly wheat, the production of which rose by 160 per cent between 1888 and 1914, showed a strong tendency to increase. Wheat was one of the leading marketable crops; it was consumed more than rye in the cities and abroad and was in great demand, particularly on the international market.

An even more marketable crop was barley, harvests of which showed a 210 per cent increase in 1914 as compared with 1888. Russia's barley and wheat acquired a high reputation on the world market, and with every five years their share increased, as we can see from the following figures.<sup>1</sup>

Years	Percentage of total sowing area for European Russia			Percentage of total sowing area for the whole of Russia		
	Rye	Wheat	Barley	Rye	Wheat	Barley
1905—05	34.1	22.3	9.3	30.9	26.5	9.3
1906—10	32.9	23.7	10.2	28.9	28.3	10.2
1911—15	32.1	24.2	11.0	27.3	30.2	11.0

Market forces triggered the cultivation of industrial crops, thus introducing a new and higher quality into agriculture.

However, despite the transforming role of the market, Russia's agriculture still remained backward, inflexible and of low market value. Whereas there had been some progress towards intensification and expansion of the more marketable crops, stock farming remained in a state of extreme stagnation. This was due, of course, to the generally low standard of farming practices and the lagging socio-economic relations that prevailed in the countryside.

(A characteristic feature of Russia's agriculture was its one-sided development. The imbalance between field crop production and stock farming was huge. In 1913 stock farming earned only 1,729 million rubles, or 23 per cent, out of a total income for agriculture of 5,630 million rubles.)

The reason for the lag in stock farming was the peasants' desperate land-hunger due to survivals of medievalism, the extreme shortage of common pastures, the impossibility of building up fod-

<sup>1</sup> See *Selskoye khozyaistvo Rossii v XX veke* (Agriculture of Russia in the 20th Century), p. 116 (in Russian).

der reserves, the unfavourable market conditions in many parts of the country and the difficulties of communication.

The following figures illustrate the evolution of stock farming over 50 years, from 1864 to 1913, in 50 gubernias of European Russia (in thousands).<sup>1</sup>

Years	Horses	Cattle	Sheep			Goats	Pigs
			rough-wooled	fine-wooled	Total		
1864-69	15,499.0	20,966.0	32,516.0	11,655.0	44,171.0	1,392.0	9,391.0
1890	19,778.7	25,528.0	—	—	46,052.2	—	9,553.7
1900	19,743.8	31,661.2	42,062.8	5,565.4	47,628.2	1,017.4	11,761.1
1913	22,771.0	31,973.6	39,287.2	2,139.3	41,426.5	872.9	13,458.3

This table shows that stock farming in all its forms was extremely unstable with little tendency towards numerical increase.

The following overall figures will help to fill in our picture of stock farming in European Russia on the eve of the First World War.

Dynamics of All Types of Livestock per  
100 Dessiatines of Sowing Area

Years	Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs
1881	26	37	77	15
1887	27	37	81	16
1893-95	28	40	64	15
1896-1900	29	47	75	19
1901-05	29	46	65	18
1906-10	30	43	58	16
1911	30	43	55	17
1913	31	42	56	18

It can be seen from these figures that Russia's stock farming had reached a limit beyond which there had to be radical changes in the country's whole economic structure. The most dangerous

<sup>1</sup> See *Sbornik statistiko-ekonomicheskikh svedenii po selskomu khozyaistvu Rossii i inostrannykh gosudarstv* (Collection of Statistical-Economic Data on the Agriculture of Russia and Foreign States), Petrograd, 1916, pp. 238-39 (in Russian).

tendency was the steady decline in the density of livestock in relation to growth of population and the totally insignificant increase in relation to sowing area. Two problems had to be solved. All vestiges of feudal-serf relations had to be abolished and favourable conditions created for better marketability and the development of market relations.

Although Russia had been drawn into the sphere of the world market, all branches of her agriculture lagged far behind those of other capitalist countries. The contrast was particularly apparent in stock farming, as can be seen from the following comparing the amounts of livestock per hundred of the population in Russia, Germany, Denmark and the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Countries	Years	Cattle	Pigs
European Russia * . . .	1913	25.4	10.7
Germany . . . . .	1914	32.2	37.4
Denmark . . . . .	1914	88.8	90.0
United States . . . . .	1915	59.0	65.4

\* The table shows the prewar years that were most favourable for the agricultural market.

Obviously there is a huge gap, particularly between Russia and Denmark, the data for which are taken from prewar years. As for Germany and the United States, although these data refer to the war years, the level of stock farming still remained high. In all countries with capitalist agriculture the emphasis was on achieving a sharp rise in the two most marketable types of livestock (cattle and pigs), and this determined the development of both the home and world markets.

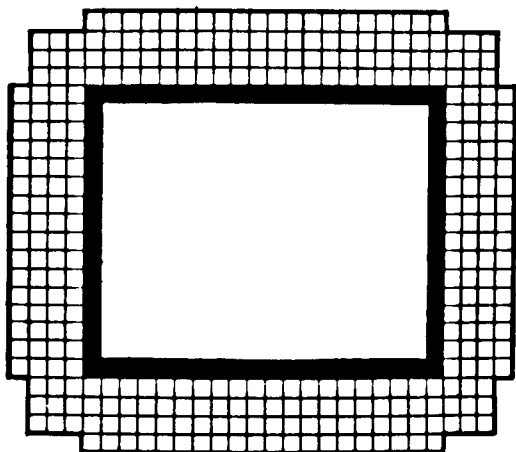
Why did Russia's agriculture even after the second agrarian reform develop so slowly, continuing to lag far behind the other capitalist countries? To this question V. I. Lenin gave an exhaustive answer in his article "The Essence of 'the Agrarian Problem in Russia'". The trouble was that the Stolypin reform had not brought about a fundamental change in the old land relations and had left the estates of the big landowners untouched.

So the agrarian question still remained unsolved. "The difference between 'Europe' and Russia stems from Russia's extreme backwardness. In the West, the bourgeois system is fully estab-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 253-54.

lished, feudalism was swept away long ago, and its survivals are negligible and play no serious role.... Undoubtedly, a system of agriculture just as capitalist has already become firmly established and is steadily developing in Russia. It is in this direction that both landlord and peasant farming is developing. But purely capitalist relations in our country are still overshadowed to a tremendous extent by feudal relations."<sup>1</sup>

This crushing weight of the big estates was splendidly illustrated by Lenin in a diagram that he used in his article "Big Landlord and Small Peasant Landownership in Russia", published in the newspaper *Pravda*, 2 March 1913.



The large white rectangle in the middle represents the estates of 30,000 large landowners, whose property in land came to about 70 million dessiatines; the small squares around it are the small peasant holdings, owned by about ten million peasant farmers each possessing about the same amount of land. This meant that on the average for every big landowner there were about 330 poor peasant families, each of them owning on the average about seven dessiatines, while every landowner had about 2,300 dessiatines. In the diagram there are only 324 small squares and the white rectangle is equal in area to that of 320 small squares. What could be clearer?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Essence of 'the Agrarian Problem in Russia'", *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, Moscow, 1968, pp. 73-74.

<sup>2</sup> See V. I. Lenin, "Big Landlord and Small Peasant Landownership in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, Moscow, 1968, pp. 586-87.

## CHAPTER VII

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA, A MAJOR STEP TOWARDS ESTABLISHMENT OF BOURGEOIS RELATIONS IN RURAL AREAS

#### 1. MARX ON THE HISTORICAL PATHS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CO-OPERATION

In the struggle against the numerous forms of capitalist oppression the working class relies mainly on the great strength of its organisation, solidarity, and unity of action. For this purpose it creates not only its political party, which recruits the more advanced and class-conscious elements; it also creates all kinds of mass organisations that bring together broad sections of the working people of town and country. Such are the trade unions, the co-operative associations and the educational and cultural societies, each of which is designed to defend the interests of the working people in some sphere or other.

Created for the admirable purpose of winning political and economic rights, the mass organisations have done much to free the working people from capitalist oppression. Prominent among these organisations are the co-operative societies, the earliest of the working people's organisations, which arose at a time when the working-class parties did not yet exist and there were scarcely any trade unions. The co-operative societies, one of the forms of the working-class movement brought into existence by the capitalist system itself, were a means of protecting working people from the attacks of rampant capitalism with its system of unbridled exploitation and oppression. Since it had its origins in utopian socialism, however, the co-operative movement right from the beginning developed separately from the class and political struggle of the working class. With a membership drawn mainly from the petty-bourgeois strata that were trying to survive in competition with big capital, the co-operatives aimed primarily at protecting their "independent" existence and remaining "free" producers, at protecting themselves from capitalist exploitation in all spheres of economic life. But all this was unrealistic. In the long run, co-



operation was bound to become, and in fact did become, a simple appendage of the bourgeois system and totally adapted to the framework of its development.

Although the co-operative societies and associations supposedly implied a resolute rejection of capitalist exploitation and sought to abolish it, the environment imposed upon them exactly opposite conditions. They had to exist in a situation of bourgeois relationships, where the activity of all economic spheres is wholly determined by the economic laws of the capitalist system. So the workers' co-operative factories, as Marx put it, although they "represent within the old form the first sprouts of the new", nevertheless "naturally reproduce, and must reproduce, everywhere in their actual organisation all the shortcomings of the prevailing system".<sup>1</sup>

In the context of intense competition between capitalist enterprises all the co-operative associations—producers and consumers—were forced to operate on capitalist lines or else be doomed to extinction. Consequently all co-operative associations were confronted with the alternative of either organising their affairs in a capitalist way or being destroyed by their own inability to adapt to the prevalent conditions.

It is still quite obvious, however, that co-operation played a positive role in the historical development of society. Both as a mass organisation and as a social form of economy, it provided many examples of organisation and solidarity, of the superiority of collective functioning and management of enterprises, and of a more equitable distribution of social products. The co-operatives were the first to enter the economic arena against big industrial, commercial and financial capital, and thereby showed the working people the strength of association, mutual assistance, collaboration and collective action.

In the Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association (1864) Marx referred approvingly to the first co-operative factories set up by workers and pioneering collective management of social production. "The value of these great social experiments cannot be overrated. By deed, instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands; that to bear fruit, the means of labour need not be monopolised as a means of dominion over, and of extortion against, the labouring

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Moscow, 1977, p. 440.

man himself; and that, like slave labour, like serf labour, hired labour is but a transitory and inferior form, destined to disappear before associated labour, plying its toil with a willing hand, ready mind and a joyous heart."<sup>1</sup>

Marx also developed these ideas about the positive role of co-operation in another, later document, *Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional Council*, which he wrote in 1866. "We acknowledge," the Instructions affirmed, "the co-operative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. Its great merit is to practically show that the present pauperising, and despotic system of subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers."<sup>2</sup>

Here Marx poses the question of co-operation as an all-embracing movement capable of transforming contemporary society and reorganising it on new principles. (As Marx understood it, the transforming role of co-operation was to manifest itself in all spheres of economic life: in production, distribution and consumption, and to embrace all branches of the national economy: industry, agriculture, trade, credit, and so on. In short, co-operation was to thrust its social roots deep into both the sphere of production and the sphere of circulation. Moreover, the main role was always assigned to co-operation in production. "We recommend to the working men to embark in *co-operative production* rather than in *co-operative stores*. The latter touch but the surface of the present economical system, the former attacks its groundwork."<sup>3</sup>)

Despite the narrowness and restrictedness of co-operation in bourgeois society, Marx saw it, and was the first to see it, as the embryo of the new socio-economic system and proposed expanding its development to national dimensions. It is particularly significant that Marx revealed the full pattern of the development of the co-operative movement, its inevitable victory and great future. He showed the triple strength of co-operation: first, co-operation as a mass organisation of the working people; second, as a form of collective production; and third, as a new socio-economic system. "To save the industrious masses," Marx wrote, "co-operative

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association", *The General Council of the First International, 1864-1866. The London Conference 1865. Minutes*, Moscow, 1974, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional Council", *The General Council of the First International 1864-1866. The London Conference, 1865. Minutes*, p. 346.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 346-47.

labour ought to be developed to national dimensions, and, consequently, to be fostered by national means."<sup>1</sup>

Reformists of every hue and every age, past and present, have clung desperately to this proposition of Marx. They have tirelessly asserted and continue to assert that with the help of co-operation it is possible to build socialism even in capitalist conditions, that only a simple quantitative increase in co-operation is needed to give mankind a splendid means of peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism. In saying this the reformists intentionally keep silent about the fact that *Marx linked the complete and real victory of the co-operative movement with the necessity for the proletariat to win state power and for private ownership of the instruments and means of production to be abolished.* More than once he pointed out that "the lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economical monopolies. So far from promoting, they will continue to lay every possible impediment in the way of emancipation of labour...."

"To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes."<sup>2</sup>

While attaching great value to co-operation as one means of transforming contemporary society, Marx in no way exaggerated its strength. He was very far from thinking that simply by increasing the number of co-operatives one could move over from capitalism to socialism. And "however useful in practice, co-operative labour will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries."<sup>3</sup>

In the context of bourgeois society co-operative associations, as they are actually organised, everywhere reproduce and are bound to reproduce all the shortcomings of the capitalist system. So for Marx they were important as a possible form of organisation of the new society, as a living proof of the need to organise large-scale social production and distribution without capitalists and big landowners. On this assumption he *set great hopes on co-operatives of the future, when state power and all the means of production would pass into the hands of the working class.*

Criticising Lassalle and other petty-bourgeois ideologists who

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association", *The General Council of the First International, 1864-1866. The London Conference, 1865. Minutes*, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 285.

regarded co-operation as a means of grafting socialism on to the capitalist system. Marx emphasised that co-operation in itself "will never transform capitalistic society. To convert social production into one large and harmonious system of free and co-operative labour, *general social changes* are wanted, *changes of the general conditions of society*, never to be realised save by the transfer of the organised forces of society, viz., the state power, from capitalists and landlords to the producers themselves".<sup>1</sup>

This scientifically based proposition of Marxism gives a clear answer to the question of the ways of transition from capitalism to socialism, a transition that can be achieved only by overthrowing the power of the bourgeoisie. For the new socialist system to be victorious state power must be won by the proletariat and this can be achieved only by revolutionary means. When it has gained state power the proletariat can and must use co-operation for organising socialist production. This was Marx's assumption when he spoke of the need to expand co-operative associations to national dimensions. Only then is the proletarian state able, on the one hand, to render all-round material assistance to the co-operative associations and, on the other, to transform them from isolated organisations into something that takes in the whole national economy. In such favourable circumstances, he pointed out, the co-operative system can embrace the whole nation and unite all the working people in free labour associations of a socialist type.

As long as he was discussing co-operation in context of capitalist society Marx remained an opponent of its dependence on the bourgeois state. "But as far as the present co-operative societies are concerned, they are of value *only* in so far as they are the independent creations of the workers and not protégés either of the governments or of the bourgeois."<sup>2</sup> *But as soon as state power passes from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat the relations between the state and co-operation must change. Then co-operation has nothing to fear from the state, which is in the hands of the proletariat and can boldly make use of the state's national resources.*

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional Council, The General Council of the First International, 1864-1866. The London Conference, 1865. Minutes*, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, Moscow, p. 25.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF BOURGEOIS CO-OPERATION

Co-operation arose and developed as a part of man's labour activity and its roots lie deep in the history of human society. The need for co-operation and mutual assistance has always been a typical feature of the activities of people engaged in physical work. In this narrow, technical sense co-operation has existed at all times in every socio-economic system and will always exist.

On the other hand, co-operation as a social form of organisation bringing people together in various associations could arise only at a specific historical stage of social development. Such co-operation became widespread only in the middle of the last century, when the bourgeoisie, as Marx showed, was by means of its all-powerful capital transforming the world in its own image and likeness.

At first, there arose *consumer co-operatives* among the artisans, workers, small officials and so on. Such co-operatives fought for their independence and tried to defend the organised consumers from being robbed and exploited by commercial capital and various kinds of middlemen and profiteers. By means of co-operatives such consumers were able to protect themselves from the deception practiced by private traders, and actually did deprive them of some of the fabulous profits that they had been pumping out of the lower sections of society.

The next step was the spread of *production co-operatives*, which became active in the sphere of purchasing, processing and sale of raw materials and organising supply and distribution. *Credit co-operatives* were also set up with the aim of organising cheap credit for their members and protecting them from exploitation by loan capital, and these were followed by *housing co-operatives*, which opposed the big owners of real estate. Having first appeared in the towns, co-operation gradually penetrated the countryside, drawing the small and middle farmers into its orbit.

Such co-operatives were a product of capitalism, a collective form of bourgeois economy. They had no intention of entering the lists against capitalism, of destroying it as a system. Their aim was just the opposite—to accommodate themselves to this system, protect themselves from its encroachments and defend the independence of the small urban and rural producer. So in its ideology

and its class composition such co-operation was not proletarian but petty-bourgeois.

The homeland of consumer co-operation was England and its ideological pioneer was the great utopian socialist *Robert Owen*. "It is an historical fact that this mighty tree grew out of the seed sown mainly by Owen. The co-operators themselves never hesitated to acknowledge their debt to the great socialist...."<sup>1</sup> The historical literature notes that as far back as the 1830s there were co-operative societies calling themselves as consumer co-operatives in several English towns. But these co-operatives had not yet evolved their internal principles, had not settled on a definite course or acquired a face of their own.

The beginning of the development of consumer co-operation is generally acknowledged to have been the Rochdale co-operatives, which evolved these principles and thus formed the basis of consumer co-operation not only in Britain but in all the European countries. In 1844, after an unsuccessful strike by the weavers of Rochdale, a group of workers decided to open their own co-operative store where they would be able to buy goods cheaper and of better quality than from the privately-owned concerns. They founded this store on funds accumulated from small weekly contributions. By the autumn of the same year the weavers had opened their co-operative and named it the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. It was mainly a workers' consumer co-operative operating on new principles.

The substance of these principles was as follows: the co-operative should conduct its affairs on its own monetary resources and not on resources provided by some rich benefactor, bank, the state, and so on. On the capital contributed by its members the co-operative should pay a small interest out of the returns; each contribution should be relatively small and could be brought by instalments. The whole profit, except for the part that went to pay the interest on the shares, should be distributed among the members according to how much they purchased. Sales should be conducted at the average market prices; the co-operative should sell only good-quality products; all weights and measures should be true and reliable; purchases should be made only in cash; the co-operative should be run on democratic principles.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Emile Vandervelde, *La coopération neutre et la coopération socialiste* (Neutral Co-operation and Socialist Co-operation), Paris, 1919, p. 10 (in French).

The positive thing about the Rochdale principles was the case they presented for independence of worker co-operation, its independence of the bourgeois state, and for keeping it free of patrons or benefactors. At the same time these principles were adapted to the capitalist system and did not strike at its foundation, did not call for struggle against it. Not a word was said about the co-operatives being ready to fight for the emancipation of the working people, for their political and economic rights. This was the clearest indication of their petty-bourgeois nature, whose stamp has remained on the British co-operative movement throughout its history.

Co-operative organisation in France developed in the same direction, but here it was the producer co-operatives that took the lead, uniting small artisans and workers in so-called associations. One of the first of such producer co-operatives was the association of jewellers and goldsmiths, founded in the middle of the 1830s. It arose under the powerful influence of the French utopian socialist *Buchez*, a follower of Saint-Simon. This association was short-lived, however. Right up to the 1850s the co-operative movement developed under the influence of the ideas of utopian socialism. Though this movement later took a completely different direction, the notable fact about it was that it was inspired by the idea of developing co-operatives independently from the bourgeois state.

The producer co-operatives in France, Britain and Germany became particularly widespread after the revolution of 1848. But, having reached its peak, the co-operative movement proved unable to maintain its class ethos, its independence, and was obliged to submit to all the standards of bourgeois society. It fell under the financial patronage of the bourgeois state and was led by the most extreme reformists.

The idea of co-operation under the patronage of the bourgeois state was pioneered by the French Right-wing socialist Louis Blanc, who proposed setting up producer associations financed entirely by the state. In its fear of revolution the bourgeoisie hastened to support this idea, and in 1848 the French National Assembly assigned three million francs for the organisation of such an association. In this way a French socialist gave the bourgeoisie an extremely "valuable" idea. As the well-known theoretician of Russian co-operation M. I. Tugan-Baranovsky writes, the astute Thiers told the deputy who tabled the motion of allocation in the National Assembly: "You ought to have asked for 20 million francs instead of three. We would have given you 20 million and it would not have been too great a price to pay for the im-

pressive experience that would have cured you all of this monumental folly." <sup>1</sup>

The bourgeoisie seized upon producer associations not because it wanted to support their development but in order to use them in its class interests, to divert the attention of the working class, the mass of the working people, from the political struggle. Although they provided material support, the bourgeoisie and its servants were convinced that the producer associations would not be able to exist for long in the alien and hostile atmosphere of capitalist society.

It was a fact that under such conditions the co-operative associations were bound either to disintegrate or turn into capitalist enterprises, which they did. Several small producer associations consisting of artisans and workers were set up on the funds that had been allotted, but none survived the competition with big capital and were soon obliged to submit to its economic laws. "As a result, within a few years, all these co-operatives, despite the efforts and good intentions of their outstanding initiators, either collapsed completely or turned into profit-making enterprises for a small number of craftsmen." <sup>2</sup>

In France, for example, the earlier producer associations gave way to consumer associations. In 1885 a congress of consumer co-operatives was held in the town of Nîmes, where a co-operative union operating on new principles was formed. These principles stated that co-operation should stand aside from all political and class struggle, that it should be based on all classes because all people were consumers and, as such, should be members of consumer societies. All co-operation was proclaimed to be above class and above parties. The well-known student of West European co-operation A. V. Merkulov wrote that a characteristic feature of the French cooperatives was "the aloofness and quite frequently hostility of their members towards the socialist party; for the most part they also keep away from the trade unions. It is a highly regrettable fact that they are completely isolated from one another with the result that they compete fiercely" <sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See M. I. Tugan-Baranovsky, *Sotsialnye osnovy kooperatsii* (The Social Foundations of Co-operation), Petrograd, 1922, p. 222 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> A. V. Merkulov, *Proizvoditel'naya kooperatsiya v Zapadnoi Yevrope* (Producer Co-operation in Western Europe), Moscow, 1918, p. 28 (in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.



In Germany co-operation fell into the hands of the bourgeoisie right from the start. Appearing after the Revolution of 1848, the German co-operatives drew their members mainly from the petty-bourgeois strata. The founder of the German co-operative movement was the liberal Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch, who openly proclaimed the need for co-operation as a means of combating socialism and revolution. On the basis of some very small material improvements for the members he succeeded in setting up a few producer co-operatives and attracting small artisans and workers. However, these co-operatives were doomed to the same fate as those in Britain and France. Apart from their openly reactionary character, the Schulze-Delitzsch co-operatives made no new contribution whatever.

On the other hand, Germany was the homeland of bourgeois agricultural co-operation, where credit societies catering mainly for peasant farms became popular. This was a new phenomenon in the world co-operative movement and later spread to all countries of Europe. Germany's agricultural co-operatives are associated with the name of the bourgeois liberal Raiffeisen, who with the help of the credit societies succeeded in turning the German peasantry into an obedient instrument of the big landowners and a cheap source of hired labour.

Raiffeisen set up his first credit society in the village of Heddersdorf in 1864. From here the new form of co-operation spread all over the country and, in doing so, become diversified into co-operative associations serving various branches of farming: credit societies, co-operatives for processing raw materials, for purchasing and sale of produce, etc. At the end of the last century Germany had over 3,000 agricultural co-operatives and by 1903 the figure rose to 27,675. By the outbreak of the First World War nearly three-fifths of Germany's farmers belonged to agricultural co-operatives.<sup>1</sup>

One of the characteristic features of German agricultural co-operation was its excellent organisation and management structure. The German co-operators fully realised that there was a unifying element in the very nature of co-operation. These tendencies were inherent not only in the initial stage of the development of co-operation, when individuals were combining in co-operatives,

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<sup>1</sup> See Sem. Maslov, *Selskokhozyaistvennaya kooperatsiya, yeyo formy, znachenie i zadachi* (Agricultural Co-operation, its Forms, Significance and Tasks), Moscow, 1922, pp. 23-24 (in Russian).

but also at the next stage, when the hitherto individual and isolated co-operatives found that they had objective grounds for combining in unions on a nation-wide scale, thereby creating a united force not only of individuals and co-operatives but also of the whole co-operative system.

Experience soon showed that individual isolated and economically scattered co-operatives had to be brought together in general territorial unions and even centralised associations. This was the path taken by German co-operation. The success of amalgamated agricultural co-operation in Germany may be judged from the following data: in 1908 Germany had 117 territorial-branch and central unions amalgamating 20,707 co-operatives, or 77 per cent of their total number. The whole network of agricultural co-operation was organised into two nation-wide centres: the Imperial Union of German Agricultural Associations and the Central Union of Rural Associations. The first was the ideological organising centre for safeguarding general co-operative interests, for instruction and auditing, and for working out general co-operative problems. The second was the centre for economic and organisational management.

The leadership of agricultural co-operation in Germany was mainly in the hands of the big landowners. For example, in 305 of Pomerania's credit associations 109 presidents of councils and 50 presidents of management boards were big landowners. In Silesia, in 619 credit associations the big landowners supplied 308 presidents of management boards and 273 council presidents. The big landowners played an even bigger part in running the central organisations of rural co-operation—unions, central funds, etc. Thus in most of Germany's rural co-operatives the leaders were not peasants but the more prosperous elements of the local population and, above all, the big landowners.

It must be admitted that co-operation in Germany won wide acknowledgement for its organisation and efficiency. Its experience swept through France, Italy, the Scandinavian countries and the Balkans; bourgeois co-operators in Russia also tried to copy it. There can be no doubt that the rapid rise of agriculture, the high degree of intensification achieved in a number of European countries owe much to the broad-scale development of co-operative production, which made available large amounts of capital and offered opportunities for its use to improve agricultural practices, mechanise farm work, build roads and large irrigation systems, and carry out more rational land surveying. The bourgeoisie has skilfully used co-operation in its own class interests.

By the outbreak of the First World War the co-operative movement embraced the majority of countries of Europe and had penetrated America and Asia (see table below).<sup>1</sup>

The co-operative movement in the West exerted a powerful influence on the new socio-economic process in Russia, following the same well-trodden paths and not changing its petty-bourgeois, anti-socialist bias. In Russia there were no producer co-operatives in the form of collective factories and workshops or, at least, we have found no evidence of such in the literature. The consumer and agricultural artels (co-operatives) arose simultaneously, basing their activities on the German model, which had pioneered and developed credit associations mainly for peasants.

	Number of co-operatives	Number of members (thous.)	Number of in- habitants per co-operative member
<b>Europe.</b> Denmark . . . . .	5,033	614	4
Switzerland. . . . .	7,827	375	10
Austria . . . . .	16,563	2,400	12
Germany . . . . .	30,555	4,800	13
Romania . . . . .	2,904	443	13
Belgium. . . . .	2,270	500	15
Finland . . . . .	1,929	200	15
Netherlands . . . . .	2,679	355	16
United Kingdom . . . . .	2,500	2,750	16
Italy . . . . .	7,564	1,667	20
Norway. . . . .	3,078	100	24
Hungary . . . . .	6,000	800	26
Sweden . . . . .	2,100	160	30
Serbia . . . . .	1,252	60	44
France . . . . .	10,983	800	49
Bulgaria . . . . .	727	50	80
Spain . . . . .	274	80	244
<b>In all . . . . .</b>	<b>104,238</b>	<b>16,154</b>	
<b>Asia.</b> Japan . . . . .	5,149	500	103
<b>America.</b> United States	500	60	1,533

<sup>1</sup> See M. I. Tugan-Baranovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

Russia's first credit co-operative arose in 1865 calling itself the Loan and Savings Association. The organisers were the Luginins and owners who had studied the German credit co-operatives while visiting Germany and on returning to Russia founded the co-operative in the village of Rozhdestvenskoye Vologda Uyezd Kostroma Gubernia. The movement was taken up by Prince Vaschikov and by Koryupanov, marshal of the Nobility of the Vologda Uyezd. However the credit associations made no notable impact until after the first Russian revolution and only came into the foreground during the First World War.

The consumer co-operatives won popularity mainly in the towns and somewhat later in factories, mines and on the railways. The first consumer societies in Russia sprang up in 1864 and 1865. One of them was founded in the Perm Gubernia and a second in Riga. These societies drew their members mainly from officials and intellectuals. From the description given by A. V. Merkuov between 1865 and 1870 a total of 76 consumer societies were organised in Russia of which two were based on industrial enterprises, one among the office employees of a steamship company, one in agriculture, while 72 were urban societies consisting of intellectuals. There were no workers or peasants in any of them.

As a rule the founders of these societies were marshals of the nobility, Zemstvo officials, mayors and police chiefs and their members were mainly officials. Such co-operation, one may conclude, was little more than a pastime for the Russian bourgeoisie who were far removed from the interests of the working people and understood neither their needs nor their aspirations. Obviously such co-operation could not succeed and not surprisingly the majority of the consumer societies collapsed soon after their foundation.

At the end of the century, however, the co-operative movement passed into the hands of the capitalists themselves who were able to exploit it in their own interests. This was done with the help of the factory mill and railway consumer societies and the widespread network of co-operative "workers' shops" which became notorious for ruthless cheating of the workers by means of false accounts and short weight. The leadership of such societies was entirely in the hands of the management. The worker member of a co-operative had no opportunity of taking part in its management. By giving

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See A. V. Merkuov *Issoreschesky ocherk potrebnelnoy kooperatsii v Rossii* (History of Consumer Co-operation in Russia) Moscow 1919 pp. 0- (in Russian)

ing the society a small loan the administration was able to lower wages accordingly and anybody who refused to join the society was deprived of the right to buy goods in the co-operative shop. The consumer societies thus became an obedient instrument of managements. In general, consumer co-operation in Russia led a wretched existence right up to the time of the first Russian revolution and the workers were fully justified in treating it with great suspicion.

### 3. AGRICULTURAL ARTELS IN RUSSIA AND THEIR SPECIFIC FEATURES

Although the development of the co-operative movement and the general trends that brought it into being both in the West and in Russia followed a common pattern, it had its specific features in every country. For Russia the characteristic form of co-operative economy was the agricultural artels, which sprang up in several places at about the same time, after the Reform of 1861. Such organisations had existed before but they had differed radically from the artels that arose under the impact of capitalism's penetration of agriculture.

The agricultural artels of the post-Reform period were distinguished by a multiplicity of economic types, co-operation of peasant labour, common instruments and means of production, and a corresponding distribution of the social products. This was indeed a specific, unique form of co-operative economy which arose from the heart of communal landownership and was well adapted to it. Characteristically also the artels at that time emerged not only with the support and material assistance of some progressive individuals from among the liberal intelligentsia, but also had enthusiasts among the peasants, who undertook to manage the economy of the artel.

Of course, there was nothing socialist about these artels. They were permeated with the petty-bourgeois spirit and capitalist economics. And yet the main incentive for their emergence was the struggle against poverty, against the oppression of kulaks and landlords, against exploitation by money-lenders and all kinds of middlemen. It was against these enemies of the peasantry that the artels acted as a collective force, trying to overcome and defeat them with their petty-bourgeois ideology and capitalist economic management. This was an expression of the petty-bourgeois illusions harboured by the peasantry, which as a rule led to the down-

fall of the artel. To gain a clearer picture of this type of co-operative farm we must briefly consider its origins and the principles of its internal life and economic activity.

The first agricultural artel in Russia arose in 1863, in one of the villages of the Soroki Uyezd in Bessarabia. It arose out of the groups of peasants who helped each other to work their strips of land. The success of these groups led them to combine in a single artel and set up a collective economy for the land of the whole commune. To begin with, the artel would work only its allotted land in common, but later it added rented land to its holding. The farm was run collectively under the control of one elected peasant, considered to be the best farmer. The sowing was done together and much quicker than before, when it had been one-man work. Harvesting and threshing were also successfully organised on collective lines. The grain was kept in a communal storehouse and several barns.

The principle on which the harvest was distributed is also of some interest. Before distribution among members of the artel all the grain was divided into three parts, one for seed, another for sale (it could be sold only if there was enough grain to last the members until the next harvest), and the third for distribution among members of the artel. Distribution was made "according to the number of working hands, including women and children". In the second year, when the harvest was good, the artel had a surplus of grain amounting to 125 chetverts,\* which it sold for 560 rubles. The bulk of this return—410 rubles—was spent on paying the rent for the land and the rest was used for opening an artel shop.

In the next few years the artel's affairs flourished. It set up an elementary school in the village, assigned funds for hiring teachers and teaching aids, purchased a windmill, built a communal stockyard, and set up a loan fund for its members. In addition, the artel acquired improved farming implements and other equipment, which made it possible to improve the tilling of its fields and raise labour productivity and the well-being of its members. But as the artel grew, it was increasingly undermined by internal contradictions which ultimately led to its collapse.

A number of other agricultural artels sprang up in the Poltava, Kiev, Chernigov and other gubernias. One was organised by peasants in a remote village of the Poltava Gubernia. It began when a small group of peasants set about tilling their allotted lands in

<sup>1</sup> Chetvert—2.09 hectolitres.

common. The example caught on. The next year the whole village joined the artel. The allotted lands were supplemented with 200 dessiatines of land rented by the artel from the local land-owner. The common cultivation of the fields proved successful. Having demonstrated the considerable advantages of collective work, the artel drew up promising plans for the future, envisaging the replacement of old farming implements, increases of sowing area and improvement of farming practices. This work in common continued, however, only until the time came to share out the harvest, when serious differences arose. The most prosperous members demanded a share in accordance with the manpower, implements and capital that they had contributed, while others regarded this principle as unjust and out of keeping with the idea of artel life and proposed sharing out the products according to the number of working hands. This principle was adopted, but we have no data concerning the artel's further development. Presumably it perished from the same disease as the Soroki artel.

At the end of the last century agricultural artels also appeared in the northern parts of Russia, in the Perm Gubernia. Here they emerged after 1891, a year of famine in which many peasants lost their horses, cows and smaller livestock and were left without seed or farming implements. Extreme poverty forced them to seek a way out of their desperate situation.

At about this time several agricultural artels arose in the Vyatka Gubernia. They were founded on the initiative of the peasants themselves and managed without Zemstvo patrons and benefactors.

The most famous artels in Russia were those of the Kherson Gubernia, which are associated with the name of N. V. Levitsky, a minor official who organised them. Levitsky drew up the first set of rules for an agricultural artel and distributed it widely among the peasants of the gubernia.

In the course of four years, despite huge financial and technical difficulties, 119 agricultural artels were set up with the help of Levitsky: one in 1894, 15 in 1895, 72 in 1896, and 31 in 1897. Most of these artels collapsed without seeing the fruits of artel labour and by the beginning of this century there were only 16 left.

One need hardly elaborate on the causes for the failure of these agricultural artels. They are clear enough. Even their initiator did not count on their existing for a very long time, regarding them merely as a means of helping the peasants to get off their feet and then go back to individual farming.

However, far from dying out among the peasantry, the idea of agricultural artels continued to haunt the imagination of the poor sections and soon blazed a new trail for itself. From 1902 the artel wave rolled through several new gubernias: Saratov, Nizhni-Novgorod, Tambov, Penza, Kiev, Poltava, and others. Admittedly, they were far less numerous than before but they differed significantly from their predecessors.

The artels of the 20th century were set up mainly on the initiative of the peasants themselves without the help of patrons or any form of tutelage. This very important fact gave far greater strength to the new artels. A significant role was also played by such factors as the growth of co-operative and bank-credit institutions, with which the artels entered into direct contractual relations for obtaining loans, negotiating land deals, and so on. All this showed that the intensified development of capitalism in the countryside had put the artels' farming on a new basis.

It also changed their economic orientation. It is significant that the surviving and newly emerging artels not only cultivated their land jointly, but also took steps to improve agricultural practices, such as adopting the four-field crop rotation and modernised farm implements, and introducing more marketable crops. But the main thing was that the artels set themselves the direct goal of emerging from the framework of the subsistence economy and becoming suppliers of agricultural produce for the market.

The artels of this period may be divided into two types. The first comprised those that confined their activities only to collective renting of land, which was then distributed according to how much each member could pay. All the rest of the work was done by each member separately. In artels of the second type attention was focussed on distributing the rented land according to the number of members in the family and the available manpower, and having it worked in common. This type of artel was considered to be the fairest and most reasonable because all peasants who joined it regarded themselves as equal members.

We have already pointed out that the agricultural artels of the early 20th century grew up mainly on rented land, which gave them the specific orientation inherent in the capitalist economy. On allotted land artels were few and far between.

The majority of agricultural artels in this period arose with active support from agricultural co-operative organisations, primarily the credit and loan-and-savings associations which had developed widely since the first Russian revolution. These institutions organised the renting of land and its transference for the use



of peasants who wished to found artels and other associations on it. At the same time they not only provided land for the artels but also offered them certain incentives to improve cultivation of the fields, introduce more intensive and marketable crops, and apply new farming practices.

Thus, the artel form of farming was used mainly as a means of uniting the efforts of a group of peasants for joint work. The artels and associations of those days were, in effect, the prototype of those that were to be widely developed after the October Socialist Revolution, on land freed of all the bonds of feudal and capitalist land tenure.

#### 4. THE RISE OF THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA AFTER THE FIRST REVOLUTION

Russian co-operation was the youngest in Europe. It came into its own in Russia only after the first revolution of 1905-07, which stimulated this broad and undoubtedly progressive social movement. But, despite its late start, co-operation in those post-revolutionary years developed so rapidly that *it was destined in a brief historical period to occupy a leading place on the international scene.* A well-known expert on Russian co-operation, the liberal professor V. Totomiants, wrote: "The co-operative movement in Russia began much later than the British, French, or German. Now, however, ... (he was speaking of 1917.—S. T.) Russia leads the world in number and variety of its co-operatives." The author attributed this tremendous advance to the fact that "the first Russian revolution of 1905 left a deep impression among the rural population. The peasants began to take a more lively interest in co-operation..."<sup>1</sup>

Russian co-operation was not only rapid in its development but also displayed a great variety of forms, which testified to its viability. Suffice it to say that whereas in 25 years (1881-1905) 1,687 consumer societies had appeared in Russia, in the next eight years (1906 to 1913) their number increased to 9,554.<sup>2</sup> The First World War intensified the growth of the consumer co-operatives. Many of the existing co-operatives were amalgamated, thus becoming stronger economically and better able to stand up to private com-

<sup>1</sup> V. Totomiants, *Kooperatsiya v Rossii* (Co-operation in Russia), Moscow, 1922, pp. 22, 23, 27 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> See A. V. Merkulov, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

petition. Most of them were rural co-operative societies, which accounted for over 70 per cent of the country's total.

Particularly rapid was the development of agricultural co-operation, in all its numerous forms and branches. The biggest were the grain, oil and milk co-operatives. Agricultural co-operation had relatively strong positions in the sphere of credit, purchasing, and the processing and sale of output. The following data for the co-operative network in Russia as of 1 January 1915 illustrate the scale of the co-operative movement and the diversity of its forms.<sup>1</sup>

	Consumer societies	Credit co-operatives	Agricultural societies	Agricultural associations for purchasing processing and sales	Butter-making articles	Others	Total
Number of co-operatives	10,900	14,350	5,000	1,650	2,700	650	35,250

✓ Russian co-operation outpaced even those countries that had relatively well developed co-operative systems such as Denmark and Belgium. Russia had more co-operatives than any other country in the world except Germany, and her credit co-operatives outnumbered even Germany's. Co-operation in Russia grew not only in absolute terms; it also became an important economic factor, despite the extremely unfavourable circumstances for its development both at home and abroad.

These unfavourable circumstances were not only the war, which had disrupted international economic ties, but also, and most importantly, the reactionary policy of the tsarist government, which saw a danger to its regime even in co-operation. Stolypin himself, who had embarked on agrarian reforms that objectively promoted the development of co-operation, did not forget this. Because of its fear that the activities of co-operative associations might take a political direction the Stolypin government took an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand it tried to encourage co-operation, while

<sup>1</sup> See *Sbornik statei i materialov po selskokhozyaistvennoi kooperatsii* (Collected Articles and Materials on Agricultural Co-operation), Moscow, 1921, p. 22 (in Russian).

on the other it used its tutelage to maintain surveillance over co-operative activities. The movement was not to be checked, however, and under the influence of the objective laws of economic development it spread all over Russia.

This is particularly apparent if we examine the development of credit co-operation, which was unusually successful, as the following data show<sup>1</sup>:

Years	Co-operatives allowed to open	Functioning co-operatives	Years	Co-operatives allowed to open	Functioning co-operatives
1900	99	785	1908	1,116	4,261
1901	151	893	1909	1,135	5,396
1902	192	1,020	1910	1,297	6,693
1903	219	1,098	1911	1,865	8,558
1904	307	1,414	1912	2,468	11,026
1905	327	1,629	1913	2,054	13,080
1906	560	2,189	1914	1,482	14,562
1907	956	2,145	1915	888	15,450

Reliance on private landownership and a solid well-to-do peasantry made it essential to organise credit and use it as a means of promoting the new agrarian policy. Of course, the war had a powerful effect on credit co-operation, which ran into serious difficulties and registered a number of failures, but already it had put down deep roots among the peasantry, particularly its better-off sections.

The next important stage in the development of co-operation in Russia was the uniting of separate co-operatives into unions, on the basis of territorial specialisation. Whereas up to 1907 there had been only one co-operative union (the Moscow Union of Consumer Societies, founded in 1898), in subsequent years such unions became widespread and embraced not only consumer societies but all other kinds of co-operative associations. Although the tsarist government viewed these unions with some apprehension, it was eventually obliged to give its official sanction to their

<sup>1</sup> See M. L. Kheisin, *Kreditnaya kooperatsiya v Rossii* (Credit Co-operation in Russia), Petrograd, 1919, p. 8 (in Russian).

activities. In 1911 the government sanctioned the formation of territorial amalgamations of credit associations and endorsed the rules of the Moscow People's Bank, which opened at the beginning of 1912.

The appearance of the People's Bank undoubtedly promoted the development of both credit and all other agricultural co-operation. Almost all co-operative institutions took out shares in it and it became the financial focus of all credit and other agricultural co-operatives, thus encouraging their amalgamation. The amalgamating movement soon assumed substantial proportions: nearly 20 such unions were formed in 1914, 76 in 1915, and 210 in 1916.

Such unions comprised mainly specialised agricultural co-operatives working in some particular branch of agriculture. Their sphere of activity covered purchasing, processing and sales of agricultural products, insurance, leasing and purchase of land for agricultural artels, associations, and so on. In general, any form of co-operation has strong unitary tendencies, which ultimately gives it tremendous inner strength. Whatever measures the government took to hinder amalgamation, the process could not be checked and as soon as restrictions were removed, a mass of co-operative unions appeared. Admittedly, they were unable to amalgamate on a nation-wide scale, but in terms of territorial and branch amalgamation these unions had completed their formation even before the Revolution.

The best known amalgamation in Russia was the Siberian Union of Butter-making Co-operative Branches with its centre in the town of Kurgan. To do it justice, this union was exceptionally efficient and had a great influence on the production and sale of butter. Formed in 1908 with only 12 butter-making artels as its members, it immediately went in for processing and selling butter not only on the home market but also with a view to developing direct relations with foreign markets without intermediaries.

The union did so well that in 1913 it already had 502 warehouses and embraced 328 butter-making artels all over Western Siberia, thus concentrating up to 80 per cent of Siberian butter exports in its hands. The most important market for Siberian butter was Britain, which received exports in 1909 of 1,546,000 poods of butter valued at 22,218,000 rubles; next came Germany, receiving 1,110,000 poods worth 15,226,000 rubles, and then Denmark with 700,000 poods at 9,489,000 rubles.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See V. Totomians, *op. cit.*, p. 89. (Most of our data are cited from this work.)

We must also mention the significant role of grain-farming co-operation, which was particularly popular in the grain-growing areas of the Volga and North Caucasus. As the grain-growing co-operatives amalgamated, they not only organised the sale of grain on the home market, but also developed exports of the most valuable marketable crops, such as wheat, barley, oats, and buckwheat, thus helping to expand the sowing area under these crops.

Co-operation appeared in all branches of agricultural production, exerting enormous influence on its development. But when co-operatives amalgamated, they launched out on such projects as building co-operative mills and elevators, wine cellars, factories for drying vegetables, brick and tile yards, cotton-ginning mills, supplying the sugar refineries with beet, organising starch and treacle production, sale of tea, hops and so on.

The development of co-operation had a considerable effect on the economic life of the countryside and accelerated the class stratification of the peasantry. *Bourgeois co-operation helped equally to strengthen the class of capitalist entrepreneurs on the one hand, and to stimulate the growth of the agricultural proletariat, on the other. None of Stolypin's agrarian laws had such a devastating effect on the village commune as co-operation. Step by step, co-operation, which had arisen in the very heart of the commune and adapted itself to its traditions and way of life, at the same time economically undermined the communal pattern of existence.*

Co-operation replaced mutual responsibility by the principles of voluntary mutual assistance; the levelling principle by the principles of individual initiative, enterprise and economic stimulus; and the commune's isolated subsistence economy by expanded commodity-money relations connected with work for the market. Thus by developing all forms of co-operation the peasant, both as a producer and consumer, was moving further and further away from his subsistence isolation and becoming more and more involved in the vortex of capitalist economy.

Equally important for the development of capitalism in farming was the spread of new forms of economic management based on financial and bank accounting and fulfilment of certain agro-technical conditions provided for under contracts. The co-operatives spread agricultural knowledge among the peasants and led them to adopt more advanced farming techniques. Agronomists, land-use surveyors, veterinaries and other specialists were often employed by agricultural co-operative societies. For example, between 1907 and 1912 the number of government agronomists increased from 141 to 1,365, and that of Zemstvo agronomists, from 593 to 3,266.

It was in the amalgamated co-operatives that the agronomists began to find a more favourable field for their activities.

*All these new phenomena evoked by co-operation were undoubtedly of progressive significance from the economic point of view. Slowly and with many setbacks, the Russian countryside was embarking on the path of capitalist development. Year by year there grew up a class of peasant bourgeoisie, a class of skilled proprietors, and prudent tenant farmers, of sophisticated exploiters, that gradually took over the Russian countryside by means of co-operation.*

A characteristic feature of all Russian co-operation was the fact that it was mainly rural, based on the well-to-do sections of the peasantry and the liberal elements among the landowner and bourgeois intellectuals. In the towns, particularly among the workers co-operation did not get either material or moral support. It is not surprising therefore that co-operation in Russia was petty-bourgeois from start to finish. Both in its social composition and its way of thinking it did not go beyond the framework of the liberal-bourgeois trend. Nevertheless, in the Russia of those days it was a step forward that undermined medieval relationships in the countryside.

## 5. LENIN'S FIGHT AGAINST REFORMISM IN THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

Although the co-operative movement had begun under the direct influence of the revolutionary proletariat, it was unable to free itself of its petty-bourgeois nature in the form in which it then existed. The first co-operatives—consumer, credit, agricultural, domestic industry, etc.—for the most part united the small producers: they had nothing to offer the proletarians and the poor peasants. Such a social environment naturally encouraged the activities of the reformist and opportunist elements, which quickly gained the upper hand in the co-operatives and intensified their petty-bourgeois tendencies by introducing the corrupting spirit of bourgeois ideology.

*In class society the petty bourgeoisie is extremely numerous in both town and country and its ideology, very widespread.* Occupying an intermediate position between the capitalists and the big landowners, on the one hand, and the proletariat, on the other, the petty bourgeoisie constantly vacillates between these two classes. Like the capitalist, the petty bourgeois is a commodity producer and himself quite often resorts to the exploitation of hired labour.

Like the big landowner, the well-to-do peasant owns a certain amount of land and sometimes employs hired labour. At the same time a huge section of the petty bourgeoisie is placed in conditions that in many ways resemble the life of the proletariat and the poor peasantry. The domination of big capital and large-scale landowning constantly threatens the existence of the petty bourgeoisie. Through restriction and exploitation, both capitalists and big landowners try to ruin the petty-bourgeois strata and turn them into proletarians, into a reserve army of labour.

This is what gives the petty-bourgeois ideology its distinctive character, its reactionary stamp. *Because of its intermediate position between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie entertains deceptive hopes of being able to rally around itself all other classes, of creating and developing a movement that is wider and stronger than the movements of classes.* And it was this desire to play the leading role in social life, to create an extra-class or supra-class movement that the petty bourgeoisie transferred entirely to co-operation, hoping to use it as a lever for reconciling class contradictions.

The petty-bourgeois orientation of the co-operatives may also be attributed to the fact that in most European countries the co-operative movement was launched not in the course of revolution and revolutionary upswing of the working classes but at times of their decline, in periods that followed the defeat of the revolutionary movement. This was the case in Britain, for example, where the co-operative movement forged ahead after the defeat of the revolutionary Chartist movement. Similarly, in Germany and France, the co-operative movement gained momentum after the defeat of the revolution of 1848, in the years of subsequent reaction. And the same thing happened in Russia, where after the defeat of the 1905 revolution the co-operative movement acquired a wider scope.

What is the reason? First of all, we must bear in mind that at times of revolution all the attention of the working classes is concentrated on the political struggle and the winning of decisive victory. They are least of all interested in any kind of co-operation because the social scene is dominated by questions of politics. After the defeat of a revolution different conditions pertain. On the one hand, the interest in politics declines among the mass of the people, disillusion and doubt as to the possibility of success in revolutionary struggle appear. On the other hand, reaction and oppression by the exploiting classes are intensified, leading the working people to seek other means of opposition and to swing

from offensive to defensive methods of struggle. One such means of defence is co-operation. But in adopting it the working masses may easily fall into the embrace of reformist co-operators who have always turned away from the idea of class and political struggle by the proletariat.

*While the progressive revolutionary leaders of the working class its most persistent and ardent fighters devoted all their will and energy to creating militant proletarian parties the reformist elements on the right retreated into the co-operative movement with the aim of weakening it ideologically and organisationally and isolating it from the political and class struggle of the working class. This happened in the West and it also happened in Russia. This largely accounts for the historical fact that the co-operative movement quickly fell into the hands of the most opportunist elements who succeeded in taking over the movement and subjecting it to bourgeois influence.*

While adopting a hostile attitude to the class struggle and socialism the majority of the co-operative leaders tried in every way to prevent co-operation from building close ties with the trade unions and the political party of the proletariat. Not without some foundation they assumed that if co-operation took the path of alliance with the progressive revolutionary forces it would inevitably come out against petty-bourgeois ideology against the idea that it should be above and beyond classes and would inevitably grow into a militant revolutionary reserve of the fighting proletariat.

One of the prominent ideologists of this petty-bourgeois trend was Charles Gide a French co-operative leader active in the second half of the 19th century who tried to provide a theoretical basis for an extra-class co-operative movement uniting all classes and all strata of society. By means of such extra-class co-operation he hoped to resolve all social contradictions and have done with the unrealistic dreams of socialism. Although this theoretical aim was not a socialist his outdated ideas were quickly taken up by other co-operators who called themselves socialists.

Such views of co-operation were typical of most co-operators in the West and in Russia. Having proclaimed the principle of co-operatives being beyond and above classes the reformists did all they could to isolate them from the socialist working-class movement to prevent the working people from absorbing the vital and inspiring ideas of socialism.

The petty-bourgeois ideologists spent a great deal of effort on trying to eradicate the revolutionary spirit of class struggle from the minds of the working people and did everything possible to



keep it out of the co-operatives, and even the trade unions and the political parties of the working class. Their ideas were frankly and plainly expressed by the German socialist Hans Müller, one-time secretary of the International Co-operative Union. Having rejected the principle of class struggle, which forms the very basis of scientific socialism, this "socialist" proclaimed for the co-operative movement the principle of neutrality, demanding that co-operation should stand aloof from socialism and the class struggle. These views can hardly be described as mistakes. In fact they were a calculated political line maintained by total renegades, a line aimed at deliberate deception of the working class, at diverting it from the path of class and political struggle to that of peaceful cohabitation with the bourgeoisie.

The co-operative amalgamations in pre-revolutionary Russia are highly significant in this respect. Having become widespread after the first Russian revolution, co-operation provided a centre of attraction for all kinds of political forces, from monarchist and Constitutional-Democratic elements to Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks. As soon as they gained control, these co-operative leaders proclaimed the slogans: "For neutral co-operatives" and "The co-operatives shall refrain from political struggle".

It is no accident therefore that Russian co-operation took no part in any of the three Russian revolutions and remained indifferent to these great historical events. On the other hand, under the disguise of "neutrality" co-operation discredited itself by connivance in counter-revolution, giving material support to reactionary organisations and providing huge funds for their maintenance. After the February Revolution, for example, the leaders of Russian co-operation joined the bourgeois Provisional Government and financed reactionary newspapers. Many local co-operative organisations under instructions from Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries advocated a policy of compromise with the bourgeoisie.

It should be said that the reformist thesis on political neutrality for the co-operatives would not have made such headway if it had not been supported by the "orthodox" theoreticians of Marxism from the Second International, who had slipped into the bog of renegation. The real point was that the opportunism of the co-operative leaders was in harmony with that of the leaders of the Second International and therefore roused no objections among Western socialists. It was the reformist leaders who did all they could to draw the co-operatives away from the socialist movement. This was admitted for example by Emile Vandervelde. "It is

a fact," he wrote, "that the co-operative movement, though socialist in origin, gradually broke away from socialism, that at a certain point the two movements became opposed to each other...."<sup>1</sup>

Generalising the experience of the international co-operative movement, V. I. Lenin revealed the basic, fundamental difference between bourgeois and socialist co-operation, both in form and substance. As we know, Marx studied working-class co-operation, the so-called workers' factories, which at that time were fairly widespread in Europe. Lenin analysed the imperialist stage of capitalism and came to the conclusion that the character of the development of capitalist industry in this new period ruled out any possibility of the existence of co-operative factories. In the 20th century the workers' co-operative factories that had existed in the West in the previous century almost disappeared. As a rule, they degenerated into joint-stock companies, that is to say, ordinary capitalist enterprises, or perished in the face of competition from the monopolies. In the new period of capitalism the co-operatives made most progress in agriculture, thus accelerating the decay of what was left of the medieval and patriarchal systems. But even in agriculture co-operation could not escape from the framework of capitalist forms of economy.

In the epoch of imperialism co-operation lost any revolutionary-democratic features that it once possessed and, naturally enough, it received no support from the Bolsheviks. It could not, of course, be rejected out of hand because it was basically an organisation of the working people and undoubtedly had progressive significance, but it could not be supported either because it had acquired a clearly expressed reformist tendency and become a refuge for anti-socialist forces. For this reason the Leninist tactics of the Bolsheviks were entirely aimed at freeing co-operation from the influence of the reformist leaders, imparting to it the spirit of political struggle and turning it into a militant organisation of the working people.

In Lenin's earliest works we find clear-cut propositions on the place and significance of co-operation in bourgeois society. Back in the 1890s, in the period of struggle against the liberal Narodniks, Lenin had exposed the theoretical bankruptcy and political harmfulness of the so-called communal co-operative farming, which was being offered as a substitute for organising the peasant masses to fight the domination of the nobility and the landlords. The Narodnik notion that agricultural artels, communal fields and

<sup>1</sup> Emile Vandervelde, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

various kinds of co-operatives could be introduced under conditions of political slavery, Lenin pointed out, was nothing but deception of the toiling peasantry. Lenin was particularly sharp in his criticism of the Narodnik and Socialist-Revolutionary conception that co-operation was a means of freeing the peasantry from the power of landowners and capitalists, a means of establishing socialism in the rural areas. In his article "Capitalism in Agriculture" Lenin wrote: "Of course, the small farmers' associations are a link in economic progress; but they express a transition to capitalism (Fortschritt zum Kapitalismus) and not toward collectivism, as is often thought and asserted..."<sup>1</sup>

He developed these ideas in his *The Agrarian Question and the "Criticism of Marx"*, *Revolutionary Adventurism*, and other works. Drawing attention to the Socialist-Revolutionaries' enthusiasm for co-operatives, Lenin explained that while power was in the hands of the landowners and bourgeoisie it was no use expecting any serious changes in the economic and social life of Russia. This meant that enthusiasm for co-operative projects would only impede the development of the class struggle, confuse the working people and delay their victory over their oppressors. "It is deception to assert that co-operatives of every kind play a revolutionary role in present-day society and prepare the way for collectivism rather than strengthen the rural bourgeoisie."<sup>2</sup>

All these reformist theories came to Russia from the Second International, which was a disseminator of corrupting bourgeois ideology. The founders of revisionism such as Bernstein, David, Vollmar, and Herz, were the first to advocate that co-operatives should be beyond and above classes, that they should be "neutral" and "non-political". It was they who provided the theoretical groundwork for the idea that co-operation was not capitalist by nature and could reform bourgeois society on socialist principles. It was they who substantiated the thesis that co-operation should stay out of the political and class struggle. All these renegade formulas were borrowed by the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary ideologists and all kinds of Russian bourgeois sociologists.

Analysing the book "Socialism and Agriculture" by Edward David, which had appeared in 1903, Lenin in his article "*Les beaux esprits se rencontrent*" (which may be interpreted roughly as: Birds of a Feather Flock Together) pointed to the direct connection between the views of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Capitalism in Agriculture", *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revolutionary Adventurism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 205.

West-European revisionists. In this book, he wrote, the author "glorifies agricultural co-operatives, expecting all possible blessings from them, demanding that the Social-Democrats help develop them, and (just like our Socialist-Revolutionaries) failing to see the bourgeois nature of these alliances between petty proprietors and agrarian capitalists, big and small."<sup>1</sup>

In the sphere of co-operative politics, as in the agrarian question, Lenin had to fight both the revisionists in Russia and those in Western Europe. When he led the RSDLP delegation at the Copenhagen Congress of the Second International, Lenin spoke against the reformist resolution tabled by the French socialist Jean Jaurès, which argued that the co-operative movement should remain neutral in politics, that bourgeois co-operation was socialist, and so on. Lenin's answer on behalf of the Bolsheviks was to introduce his own draft resolution, which clearly set forth the Marxist views on the co-operative movement and demonstrated the need to draw the co-operatives into the political and class struggle of the proletariat. Lenin played an important part in the congress. As a result of his bold exposure of the revisionists and reformists "the International gave, in essentials, a correct definition of the tasks of the proletarian co-operative societies"<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time Lenin rejected all left sectarian attitudes to co-operation. We know how severely he criticised the so-called otzovists—the "leftist" ranters, who scornfully turned their backs on the mass legal organisations and maintained that they were no use for agitation and propaganda work. *In the sphere of the Party's policy on co-operatives Lenin defined three main objectives: first, the creation of independent workers' consumer co-operatives and getting workers to take part in them; second, the all-round promotion of the revolutionary-democratic trend in all working people's co-operative organisations; and third, the systematic exposure of the bourgeois-reformist policies of the co-operative leaders.*

Generalising the experience of the workers in the independent co-operatives<sup>3</sup>, Lenin wrote in 1910 that "proletarian co-operative societies enable the working class to better its conditions by reducing exploitation by middlemen, influencing the working conditions in the supplying firms, improving the situation of office workers,

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Les Beaux Esprits Se Rencontrent* (which may be interpreted roughly as: Birds of a Feather Flock Together)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 433.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Question of Co-operative Societies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, Moscow, 1967, p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> In 1913 there were 39 registered independent workers' co-operatives.

and so forth...."<sup>1</sup> Such workers' co-operatives acquired ever greater importance in the strike campaigns and were increasingly drawn into the political and class struggle. A no less important role was played by these co-operatives in teaching the workers to manage their own affairs in the sphere of trade and in training them to be proletarian organisers and managers. Lenin was convinced that the revolution would be victorious and knew how much such personnel would be needed in the new socialist state.

He constantly drew the Party's attention to the need for socialist propaganda and agitation in the co-operative organisations, maintaining that this would spread the ideas of class and political struggle among the working people. In the draft resolution for the Sixth All-Russia Conference of Bolsheviks (1912) he pointed out that there was a generally acknowledged need to combine legal and illegal socialist work among the masses; it was recognised that the Social-Democrats should gain political influence in all working-class co-operative societies and other mass organisations of the working people, so as to turn them into strongholds of unity of the progressive forces of revolutionary democracy. In 1915 he again urged "the most active participation of *all* members of Party in all economic struggles & in *all* trade union & co-operative organisations of the working class"<sup>2</sup>.

Marxist-Leninist theory on the historical role of the co-operative movement has retained its relevance to this day. It exposes the contemporary bourgeois ideologists, who advocate reformist theories of so-called people's co-operative socialism, of "transforming capitalism on the basis of co-operative production", and so forth. All these "theories" pursue the same aim of poisoning the working people's consciousness with bourgeois ideology, diverting their attention from the class and political struggle, and gearing the co-operative movement to the interests of capitalism.

*Experience has shown that co-operation as a natural social phenomenon can be fully developed in all its diverse forms only when supreme political power is in the hands of the proletariat. It then becomes not only a means of radical social and economic change, but also a powerful weapon for liberating the working people of all forms of exploitation and oppression.*

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Draft Resolution on Co-operative Societies from the Russian Social-Democratic Delegation at the Copenhagen Congress", *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Letter to the Secretary of the Socialist Propaganda League", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, Moscow, 1964, p. 424.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE AGRARIAN QUESTION DURING THE FIRST WORLD IMPERIALIST WAR AND THE SECOND BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

#### 1. COLLAPSE OF THE PEASANT ECONOMY DURING THE WORLD WAR

Before it could recover from the confusion created by Stolypin's landlord-oriented reform, Russia's economy was subjected to the even greater and more destructive shocks of the first world imperialist war.

##### *A. Huge Loss of Productive Manpower in Rural Areas*

The worst effects of the government's mobilisation measures were felt in the rural areas which had already been pillaged by the landowners. *The countryside was now brought to the brink of total disorganisation and economic collapse* by the unrestrained withdrawal of manpower, draught animals, food and raw materials, the imposition of even heavier taxes and the introduction of numerous additional duties for the rural population.

Worst of all the war swallowed up a huge mass of healthy young men in their prime and stripped the villages of what little productive manpower they still possessed. In previous wars the armies had run to hundreds of thousands, but this war demanded tens of millions of soldiers. *In the first year of the war 7,445,000 men were called to the colours, but even this was not enough and in the second year another 4,355,000 were recruited.* In some areas nearly every man who could hold a rifle or do some kind of work for the front was drawn into the net of mobilisation.

The following data provide a vivid picture of the mobilisation of manpower resources<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> See S. N. Prokopovich, *Voina i narodnoye khozyaistvo* (War and the National Economy), Moscow, 1918, p. 151 (in Russian).

Serving in the army before the war	1,370 thousand
1914, second half year, mobilised	5,115 "
1915, first " " "	2,330 "
1915, second " " "	2,880 "
1916, first " " "	1,475 "
1916, second " " "	1,270 "
1917, first " " "	630 "
Total . .	15,070 "

The main burden of the mobilisation fell on the shoulders of the working peasantry but scarcely touched the landed estates and kulak farms, which were able to buy their way out of all military duties. The continuing war mobilisation literally drained the farming areas of manpower. All peasant farms were short of hands. The 1917 census<sup>1</sup> may be cited to give a clearer picture of the manpower situation in the rural areas (see table on p. 252).

This table shows the situation in the gubernias of the hinterland; the frontline gubernias were even worse hit by heavy mobilisation. Agriculture had to rely on the very old and the very young.

The enormous drain of manpower out of agriculture put many of the small peasant farms out of business. In the first year of the war alone more than 300,000 peasant farms with about three desiatines of land went bankrupt. With deadly accuracy the war clarified the picture of differentiation in the rural areas. The social poles between rich and poor stood out as never before.

But the big estates and kulak farms experienced scarcely any labour shortage. For one thing, the ruined peasant families supplemented the reserve army of labour. As the war dragged on, the number of farm labourers ready to work for a crust of bread grew to the unprecedented figure of 7 million. Secondly, cheap female and child labour was widely employed. And finally, the government kept the big estates well supplied with labour by sending large numbers of prisoners of war and refugees from the frontline areas.

But other material sacrifices were demanded by the war. A critical situation was created by the wholesale requisitioning of horses, the peasant farms' main source of traction. By the second half of 1917 agriculture had lost more than five million work horses, which was a fatal blow to the small peasant farms. We must

<sup>1</sup> See M. A. Sirinov, *Ocherki po agrarnoi statistike* (Essays on Agrarian Statistics), Moscow-Petrograd, 1924, pp. 397-98, 404 (in Russian).

remember that in this respect Russia was at a grave disadvantage. Whereas Europe and particularly America already had considerable mechanical traction capacities and horses were less important to the economy, for Russia the horse was still the prime mover.

Gubernia	Percentage of working peasants called up for army	Percentage of farms left without workers
Archangel . . . .	45.7	35.9
Astrakhan . . . .	45.9	31.7
Vologda . . . . .	52.3	36.8
Vyatka . . . . .	49.2	18.2
Kazan . . . . .	44.9	24.1
Kiev . . . . .	51.8	37.6
Moscow . . . . .	45.2	44.0
Nizhni-Novgorod . . . . .	46.9	34.7
Olonets . . . . .	51.8	35.7
Samara . . . . .	49.0	32.3
Saratov . . . . .	47.4	30.7
Smolensk . . . . .	43.9	30.1
Tambov . . . . .	47.6	26.1
Tula . . . . .	48.5	36.5
Ufa . . . . .	44.7	30.1
Kharkov . . . . .	49.2	30.6
Don Region . . . .	43.5	25.9
Altai . . . . .	53.7	44.3
Amur . . . . .	55.1	43.0
Trans-Baikal . . . .	54.8	41.1
Primorye . . . . .	43.4	33.9
Tobolsk . . . . .	51.9	37.4
Tomsk . . . . .	44.5	42.5

But in addition to this enormous loss of manpower and draught animals the peasant farms were also short of farm implements. During the war the supply of industrial goods for agriculture almost dried up with the result that the villages lacked even the meagre deliveries of instruments of labour that they had received before the war. The factories producing agricultural implements were flung out of gear in the very first year of the war. Owing to lack of metal and manpower some of them stopped production or



worked at a very low capacity, while the rest went over to arms production. By December 1914 the larger agricultural machinery factories had cut production by 67 per cent, and by September 1915, by 78 per cent. A survey for 1916 revealed that 173 large agricultural machinery factories were producing only 25 per cent of their 1913 output.

The catastrophic fall in production of farm machinery may be attributed mainly to government neglect, which left these factories without manpower and metal in the first year of the war. By 1917 the industry was running at only 15 per cent of its prewar capacity (see table).<sup>1</sup>

Years	Output million rubles	Percentage of output of farm implements and machines
1913	60	100
1914	43	90
1915	30	50
1916	12	20
1917	9	15

The second source of supply—imports, particularly from Germany, where Russia had previously bought 50 per cent of its farm machinery—was also blocked. And finally, the countryside was deprived of any support from small and domestic industry, which was also in a state of collapse. In prewar days this output had amounted to between six and eight million rubles. When war was declared some of the small producers were called up, and lack of materials soon forced the rest to shut up shop and go to town in hope of earning better money. The situation got so bad that even the smithies closed down and there was nobody to repair a plough, adjust a scythe, sharpen a sickle or mend harness and wagons. The villages were stripped of even the most primitive instruments of agricultural labour.

We have considered the three main sectors affected by the war. *The war robbed the villages of their essential manpower, and left them without traction and without farm implements.*

<sup>1</sup> See V. I. Grinevetsky, *Poslevoyenniye perspektivy russkoi promyshlennosti* (Postwar Prospects of Russian Industry), Moscow, 1922, p. 20 (in Russian).

### *B. Collapse of the Agricultural Economy and Food Supplies*

Agriculture's economic system broke up under the impact of an enormously destructive chain reaction effecting the whole country. Sowing areas and livestock were reduced, fields lost their fertility, harvests grew less and less, total agricultural output fell, and a tremendous food shortage developed. The financial system and credit operations run by the banks were disorganised. In short, the war turned all material and intellectual resources to the unproductive, parasitic work of gobbling up the fruits of human labour. Here are some concrete facts and figures that illustrate the scale of these destructive processes.

Agricultural decline began with a sharp reduction in sowing areas, which affected all areas of European Russia and particularly its grain-growing regions, which had been the most productive of all. For example, by 1917 sowing areas had been reduced by 33.8 per cent in the North Caucasus, by 18.1 per cent in the Lower Volga area, by 20.9 per cent in the Central Industrial area, by 14.2 per cent in the Southwest, including the Ukraine, and by 12.9 per cent in the Novorossiisk area. Weeds flourished on the badly tilled soil and the fields became overgrown. In 1917, despite favourable climatic conditions the grain harvest was only 28 per cent of 1913 total and most of it was brought in by the big estates and kulak farms, which had not lost their economic capacity.

The next victim of this decline was livestock. In the first year of mobilisation alone the peasant farms lost 18 million head of livestock, including 14 million cattle, which was over 17 per cent of the total prewar herds.

In the wake of economic disintegration came a catastrophic food shortage and failure of supplies of prime necessities for both the army and the population. The food shortages were aggravated by disorganisation of the home market, lack of organised supply agencies and transport, and a wave of profiteering. This was the weakest spot for both the war front and the people at home.

Under wartime conditions government agencies proved totally incapable of organising purchases and food supplies. The chaotic food situation grew worse and worse both at the front and in the rear. In October 1915, for instance, a survey revealed that out of 659 towns 500, i. e. 75.8 per cent, were experiencing grave food shortages. Local government agencies, paralysed by wildfire profiteering and price rises fell into the hands of businessmen and profiteers and left the population without food. At the same time the

military supply agencies, which enjoyed unlimited powers, more and more often resorted to punitive measures such as requisitioning. Thus, the towns were doomed to starvation and the villages, to poverty.

The enormous difficulties in organising food supplies were created not only and not so much by economic factors as by the selfish class policy of the bourgeois-monarchist government. War-time conditions demanded a firm policy on the food front, resolute measures against profiteering and immediate confiscation of foodstocks hoarded by traders, kulaks and the big landowners. But this the aristocratic government did not do. Its main concern was to protect the interests of these classes against all restrictions.

Furthermore any measures of non-economic compulsion ran into powerful opposition from the big landowners and merchants, who demanded a free market and economic freedom to pump huge profits out of the starving people.

The class character of the government's economic policy showed up particularly in the price system, or rather lack of system, for farm produce. At the beginning of the war the government had two points of view on this question. Some favoured free exchange and free prices, while others advocated fixed prices and a monopoly of the home market. In a situation of this kind one would have expected a firm government policy of centralised regulation on all matters concerning food supplies. But this was not done and naturally led to massive disorganisation throughout the food supply system.

All through the war there was an abnormal situation created by the existence of two artificially divided markets, one with fixed prices for the working peasants, and the other with free prices to satisfy the interests of the landowners, kulaks, traders and profiteers. The result was disastrous. Food prices soared, particularly on grain. In the first year of the war wheat prices rose 135 per cent, rye 151, oats 215, and barley 151 per cent. These increases forced the government to issue paper money in order to keep up with the runaway elements of the free market. But this measure produced the opposite results. The flood of paper money led to more intensive price rises and presaged financial collapse.

The first year of food supply work went off more or less successfully. Thanks to the existence of some old stocks the government was able to purchase 302 million poods of grain, which covered most requirements. In the second year it purchased 343 million poods, but only with enormous difficulties. All reserves were now at the minimum and the disastrous food situation that

broke out in the third year of the war began to develop. Fixed prices were declared for all basic items—rye, millet, buckwheat, wheat and barley—but it was too late and the step itself was purely formal because free prices had not been abolished. The elemental forces of the market overwhelmed the supply system to such an extent that its approaching collapse was obvious.

In the circumstances there was no alternative but to take drastic measures. This the government did. In September of 1916 it introduced requisitioning, which proved to be a fatal blow to the peasant economy. A requisitioning target of 772 million poods of food supplies for the front was set while the towns were completely ignored. But despite compulsory measures only 540 million poods, or 69.9 per cent of the target, were collected.

This meant that the peasants had to bear the main burden of the war. The flower of their manhood, their draught animals and even their implements of labour were sacrificed. And finally, they were hit by the full impact of requisitioning to supply the army and the urban population.

As Lenin wrote, the war caused such terrible ruination that some of Russia's small peasant farms were left without draught animals and implements. A contemporary observer described the situation as follows: "Metal shortage, coal shortage, leather crisis, crisis in the production of flour and butter, shortage of fish,—all these are the disastrous results of the national economy's incapacity to meet the demands of the war. For every market there are specific forms of expression for the general process of exhaustion, disintegration, but it is essentially the same process all over."<sup>1</sup>

### *C. Disorganisation of the Home Market and Destruction of World Economic Ties—Their Disastrous Effect on Russia's Agriculture*

The war destroyed world economic ties, disorganised the internal agricultural market, straight-jacketed commodity and money relations, and paralysed the sale, supply and processing of raw materials. All this immediately affected the production sphere, which also began to shrink and fall apart.

We have already described the difficulties and obstacles that Russia had to overcome in reaching the mainstream of commodity

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<sup>1</sup> V. G. Groman, *Organizatsiya narodnogo khozyaistva. Materialy k ocherednomu syezdu soyuza gorodov* (Organisation of the National Economy. Materials for the Congress of the Cities Union), Moscow, 1917, p. 17 (in Russian).

and money relations. Nevertheless, before the war Russia's agriculture was at the stage of development when the market (home and foreign) had become a vital necessity. The peasant farms took the market as their guide. They had to consider its fluctuations and adapt to its needs. This could be seen from the development of agriculture, which slowly but surely was moving in the direction of intensification. Larger areas were being sown to such highly marketable crops as wheat and barley with a corresponding decline in the less marketable items.

Through trade the peasant was able to acquire machines, instruments and other goods that he needed for his farm and personal use. In short, the market drew Russia's agriculture into its orbit so forcibly that it began to control the direction of its development. It was only natural, therefore, that the disorganisation of market relations played havoc with the peasants' economic interests. The disruption of the market forced the peasant to reorganise his activities.

We have no intention, of course, of attributing any independent significance to the market. It is well known that the development of the market is merely a result of the growth of production. On this question Marx wrote: "...The intensity of exchange, its extent and nature, are determined by the development and structure of production.... All aspects of exchange to this extent appear either to be directly comprised in production, or else determined by it"<sup>1</sup>. From this scientific proposition it may be inferred that production takes priority in the economic development of society.

This does not mean, however, that exchange must always play a subordinate, passive role. From the example of Russia it can be seen how important commodity and money relations were in the development of agriculture. One aspect could no longer be separated from the other. To borrow a phrase from Marx, production and distribution became for Russia's economy the organic whole that could develop only through the close interaction of all its parts. If one link snapped the whole chain was broken.

*The war proved to be a shock that set the whole economic organism tottering.* With the collapse of world economic relations in agriculture and relations on the home market, the sale, supply and processing of raw materials were paralysed. All this immediately affected agricultural production, which diminished and disintegrated in its efforts to adapt to economic isolation. From the

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow, 1970, p. 204.

outset market relations within the country were badly disrupted. The links between various districts were broken and they became economically isolated, particularly the most productive areas, which were the first to suffer from a lack of markets for their goods.

The disruption of various economic ties led in its turn to extremely unstable prices on agricultural produce, where the swing of the pendulum was enormous. While Moscow, Petrograd and other industrial centres experienced grave food shortages and incredible leaps in the price of food, the producing areas suffered the opposite effects.

The war had its biggest impact on the progressive aspects of economic development. The first war year saw a decline in the production of the most intensive and marketable crops because the market was now crying out for such basic crops as rye, oats and millet.

The rapid disintegration of market relations in Russia had two basic causes: *first*, the underdeveloped system of rail and water transport, which was almost entirely occupied with military freight; and *second*, the division of the country into producer and consumer areas. The result was that the former experienced difficulties in selling their produce, while the latter were plagued by shortages; the former had extremely poor communications with the big industrial centres; the latter, on the contrary, though well provided with communications, had no opportunity of using them. Organised exchange within the country, let alone abroad, can only proceed if sufficient transport is available. There may be plenty of goods but the consumer may still go short because of lack of means of delivery.

The situation demanded that all goods should flow smoothly in the right direction, but this was Russia's weakest spot. Under war-time conditions the lack of transport had a crucial effect on her economic relations. The economically developed areas were cut off from each other and Russia was compelled to rely almost exclusively on draught animals. Matters were complicated by the fact that from the outset there was no centralised control of rail transport with the result that it was used very inefficiently.

The upshot was complete demoralisation of economic life in the villages, which were increasingly isolated from the towns by the decline of industry and the disruption of exchange. The villages were not interested in the production and sale of their goods; the peasant farms were deprived of stimulus and crushed by the burden of requisitioning and shortage; and for purely objective

reasons they could neither develop nor hold the level that had already been achieved.

Agriculture also suffered heavy losses owing to the disruption of world economic ties. Russia was particularly sensitive in this respect because of its poorly developed economy. The link with Europe, with its better developed economy, was not only economically important for Russia. It had a tremendous progressive influence in altering the social structure and particularly in eliminating the old feudal relations in Russia's agriculture. Following the example of other countries that were more industrialised, Russia step by step was drawn into the world economic system and borrowed its advanced methods. So both importing and exporting were a vital necessity for all branches of her economy.

The disruption of world economic ties was a far greater blow to Russia than to the other European countries. Russia's agriculture was particularly badly hit because she figured on the world market mainly as a supplier of farm produce, which before the war had accounted for 80 per cent of all her exports. Between 1911 and 1913 annual imports were valued at 597.6 million rubles, while exports of various agricultural produce came to 1,343.7 million rubles. The disruption of these ties destroyed the stimulus not only to expand production but even to maintain the existing level of economic development. During the war both imports and exports slumped.<sup>1</sup>

Years	Exports, millions of goods	Per cent	Imports, millions of goods	Per cent	Import farm machines and instruments, millions of goods	Per cent	Imports mineral fertilisers, millions of goods	Per cent
1909-1913	1,422.8	100.0	686.2	100.0	9.7*	100.0	31.7*	100.0
1914	814.3	57.2	649.1	94.6	7.2	75.0	22.7	70.0
1915	131.6	9.3	240.3	35.0	0.3	4.0	4.1	12.0
1916	143.6	10.1	250.0	36.4	0.3	4.0	0.01	6.0
1917	59.6	4.2	178.0	25.9	1.7	—	0	—

\* 1911 - 1913.

<sup>1</sup> See *Vneshnaya torgovlya i narodnoye khozyaistvo Rossii* (Foreign Trade and the National Economy of Russia). Collection of Articles, Moscow, 1923, p. 38 (in Russian). *Selskoye khozyaistvo Rossii v XX veke* (Russia's Agriculture in the 20th Century), pp. 308-09, 321 (in Russian).

The table shows that the greatest loss from the general decline in export and import was suffered by agriculture, which was hit on all sides by the hardships of war. Lack of goods, closure of the European frontier, disruption of transport, reduction of sowing areas and livestock, all combined to place agriculture in a critical situation.

The worst, however, was yet to come. The war was having effects that were to show themselves to the full only in the postwar period. Lenin described the situation as follows: "...if it has befallen us to suffer particularly severe and acute agony from the famine, which is afflicting us more and more heavily, we must clearly realise that these misfortunes are primarily and chiefly a result of the accursed imperialist war. This war has brought incredible misfortunes on all countries, but these misfortunes are being concealed, with only temporary success, from the masses and from the knowledge of the vast majority of the peoples"<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. THE SECOND BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA. THE "SACRED" ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE BOURGEOISIE, LANDOWNERS AND RIGHT-WING SOCIALISTS AGAINST THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE

Not only did the war expose all internal contradictions; it gathered them into a single revolutionary flood that swept away the fragile foundation of the autocracy. When it entered the war, the tsarist government had counted on disposing of Russia's revolutionary forces and thus preventing the imminent explosion that had been building up in the years before the war. But this was a mistake. Although the war may have postponed the destruction of the monarchy, it equally accelerated the formation of the revolutionary forces, which were soon to bring about the democratic and socialist revolutions.

The root causes of the February Revolution were essentially the same as those of the Revolution of 1905. But now there were additional factors, to which the autocracy was most vulnerable. The second year of the war witnessed the outbreak of three major crises, from which only revolution could extricate the country:

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Session of CEC, Moscow Soviet and Trade Unions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, Moscow, 1965, p. 423.



[first] the economic crisis the collapse of the national economy and the complete disruption of finance trade and food supplies [second] the military-political crisis constant defeats at the front treachery among the high command intrigues conspiracies and embezzlement among the tsarist government and general confusion among the bourgeoisie and [third] the revolutionary upswing of the working class the peasantry and the mass of the army rank-and-file which threatened to develop into a nationwide armed uprising

And this was what happened. The war far from delaying the destruction of the monarchy actually accelerated it. The revolutionary thrust of the mass of the people was so powerful that only a few days were needed to topple the decaying edifice of the autocracy. But the revolutionary people were not to enjoy the fruits of the victory. Having gained power with the direct support of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries the bourgeoisie refused to satisfy the people's basic demands. It neither achieved the long-awaited peace nor did it solve the problem of the land which the peasantry longed for and needed so badly.

The history of all the bourgeois revolutions clearly shows that the bourgeoisie has never allowed the working peasantry to take over the big estates without payment or compensation. In no country has the bourgeoisie on coming to power ever dared to abolish feudal property and the oppressive medieval system of peasant exploitation that goes with it. Always and everywhere the bourgeoisie has betrayed its ally and turned away from it in the moment of victory.

The Russian bourgeoisie followed the traditional course adopting the usual well-trodden methods to achieve its political aims. After the February Revolution its first action was to proclaim the abolition of all landed estates and the full protection from any encroachments by the peasantry. The Constitutional-Democrats the biggest bourgeois party which in the first revolution had tried to play the role of an opposition now abandoned its previous agrarian demands.

In coalition with the Octobrist Party in the bourgeois Provisional Government the Constitutional-Democrats concluded with the landowners and nobility a holy alliance against peasant sedition and demanded that the peasants should pay compensation for any and they received on the basis of a voluntary agreement with the nobility and other owners of large estates. Not only did the bourgeois government distribute hundreds of crores rupees warning against arbitrary seizure of the landed estates but also sent armed

detachments to all parts of the country to deal with rebellious peasants. Its guardians of public order, the so-called government commissars for land affairs, were given special powers, including the right of taking punitive action against the peasantry.

Besides these punitive measures the bourgeoisie also made use of the organised forces of the landowners themselves and tried to combine the landowners and individual farmers into a bloc that would resist the increasing pressure from the peasant masses. This was the purpose of the Alliance of Landowners, which, the bourgeoisie hoped, would be able to stand up to all the revolutionary organisations of the peasantry.

The first meeting of this alliance in May 1917 was followed by the All-Russia Congress of Landowners, which approved a resolution calling for protection of private property in land and resolute struggle against any claims that might be made against it. Gubernia and uyezd congresses of the Alliance of Landowners were subsequently held in many towns and fully supported the resolution approved by the central congress.

However, the situation in the villages had already gone too far and the bourgeoisie fully realised that the measures it had taken could not ensure peace and public order. So in order to give the impression of being concerned about the difficulties of the peasantry, the bourgeoisie promised a new agrarian reform—but only after the victorious conclusion of the war. By way of preparation for this reform the Provisional Government set up a Land Committee under the Ministry of Agriculture and corresponding local land committees. The government then came out with a decision suspending the Stolypin law on the peasant's right to leave the commune and acquire part of its land as his personal property; at the same time the so-called land surveying commissions were abolished.<sup>1</sup>

Like the Stolypin government in its day, the Provisional Government was generous with all kinds of promises with which it hoped to make the peasants acquiescent and lead them into a new trap. The bourgeoisie hastened to strengthen its position, dull the consciousness of the peasant masses and divert them from the struggle against the landowners. It also enlisted the aid of the Zemstvos and gave them full power in local areas.

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<sup>1</sup> The Provisional Government's decision on the Land Committee was passed on 19 March 1917. The decision on local land committees was endorsed by the government on 21 April 1917. The decision suspending the action of the law on peasant landownership and land use was passed on 1 June 1917.

*So here was a situation in which the government commissars, the Alliance of Landowners, the Zemstvo councils and, finally, the punitive detachments were the forces on which the bourgeois Provisional Government relied to solve the agrarian question.*

Of course, in the circumstances pertaining after the February Revolution the bourgeoisie could hardly have mobilised these counter-revolutionary forces if it had not drawn its main political support from the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who backed reactionary policy in home and foreign affairs up to the hilt. Not surprisingly, these so-called socialist parties had actually adopted the positions of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. They had already shown their opportunism during the first revolution, when they had leaned towards the Constitutional-Democrats, Octobrist Party and other bourgeois parties.

(The ten years that had elapsed between the two revolutions had brought them so much closer together that during the First World War they acted in complete unity. Both the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries were quick to declare themselves social-patriots and after the second revolution became active supporters of the war. Now they advocated coalition with the bourgeois parties and abandoned the revolutionary slogan of "All power to the Soviets!", even when they had a majority in them.

In those tragic years, when the interests of the state demanded the greatest possible unity of the healthy forces of the nation in order to restrain and bring to book the organisers of the war, there was an outbreak of monstrously chauvinistic propaganda under the slogans of "Everything for the War!" and "War to a Victorious Conclusion!" Under the banner of imperialist banditry reactionaries of every kind, from civil servants to clergymen, including the Holy Synod, joined forces. The Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries and broad sections of them of the bourgeois liberal intellectuals marched shoulder to shoulder with the arch-reactionary bourgeois-landowner parties. All were dedicated to the foul business of war propaganda.

This chauvinistic campaign spread a poisonous fog over society. The bourgeois-monarchist ideologists presented the war as little short of a blessing for Russia. Academics found theoretical grounds to "prove" the necessity for war and the "invulnerability" of Russia's economy. The cynical argument was advanced that the war would soak up the surplus rural population and thus benefit overpopulated Russia. The main sufferers from the war, so these academics claimed, would be the industrially developed countries, while the agricultural countries, including Russia, would escape

any serious consequences. In their view Russia's abundance of raw materials would prevent the disruption of her national economy. They even went to the length of saying that the abundance would be an obstacle to her normal economic development.

For instance, the well-known economist Tugan-Baranovsky drew the conclusion that the Russian peasantry, far from losing by the war, had done quite well out of it. He wrote: "The war has, of course, had profound effects on our national economy, but it is industrial and urban Russia that has suffered most from the war. As for the rural masses and the main mass of the Russian people, the peasants, they have lost little from the war in the economic sense and even, thanks to the cessation of the sale of vodka, are in a by no means worse and perhaps even better economic position than before the outbreak of hostilities."<sup>1</sup>

Another troubadour of the war, Prince Trubetskoi, cynically declared that the peasantry was actually getting rich on the war. "...To any unbiased observer it is obvious," he wrote, "that the rural areas are growing richer despite everything—despite the war and the rising cost of living. This improvement in the well-being of the rural population during a world war is the most astonishing and paradoxical phenomenon that may currently be observed. Some two years ago it might have seemed to us incredible, and yet it is now being confirmed by all observations of our rural life. All the opinions one hears from people in the countryside and Zemstvo officials agree that the countryside is now living much better than before the war."<sup>2</sup>

These theories were supported by the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary ideologists, specifically professors Oganovsky, Brutskus and Genzel. They tried to prove that the backwardness of industry, Russia's weakness, was really one of her strengths, that Russia was better able to endure the stress of war because of its cultural and technical backwardness and its agricultural character. Pulling in the same harness as reactionary bourgeois propaganda, they found a good many "arguments" to prove the invulnerability of agricultural Russia.

At the same time the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries drew horrific pictures of the danger of civil war and revolutionary action by the people which, so they alleged, spelled disaster for the national economy. Brandishing the scarecrow of disruption, chaos

<sup>1</sup> *Yezhegodnik gazety "Rech"* (Yearbook of the newspaper *Rech*) for 1915, p. 471 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *Russkoye Slovo* (Russian Word), 1916, No. 1, p. 3.

and famine, they urged the working class and the peasantry to abandon political strikes and arbitrary seizure and ransacking of the big estates. Even when the Soviets gained power, these ideologists alleged that it was not the imperialist but the civil war and socialist revolution that had ruined Russia's economy.

In this atmosphere of rampant chauvinism and obscurantism the mighty voice of reason and truth, the voice of the Bolsheviks, sounded forth like an alarm bell. Lenin repeatedly pointed out that four years of imperialist war had harmed Russia more than other countries, and that the peasantry had suffered most from the war. Russia had indeed suffered the heaviest losses of all the belligerent countries. This can be seen from the table, which shows the movement of national wealth during the four years of war (in thousand million gold marks):

Country	Volume of national wealth		Reduction of wealth
	1914	1919	
Russia . . . . .	250	100	150
France . . . . .	260	180	80
Great Britain . .	325	275	50
Germany . . . . .	375	250	125
Austria-Hungary .	170	100	70
United States . .	850	1,200	Increase of 350,000 million gold marks

"This war," Lenin wrote, which has affected almost the whole of the globe, which has destroyed not less than ten million lives, not counting the millions of maimed, crippled and sick, this war which, in addition, had torn millions of the healthiest and best forces from productive labour—this war has reduced humanity to a state of absolute savagery."<sup>1</sup>

*The February Revolution revealed the appalling treachery of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who had taken up the defence of the landed estates and were supporting the punitive meas-*

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Fourth Conference of Trade Unions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 460.

*ures of the bourgeois government against the working peasantry.* There can be no doubt that in the situation which evolved after the February Revolution the bourgeoisie would not have dared to take such extreme measures if it had not been supported by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, with whose help it set about crushing the peasant struggle for land, bread and freedom. Having made common cause with the counter-revolutionary bourgeois and landowner parties, the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries pandered to them by scrapping their former revolutionary-democratic demands and abandoned any attempt to pursue their agrarian programmes.

**Part III**

**THE SOCIALIST  
REVOLUTION  
AND THE GREAT  
AGRARIAN  
TRANSFORMATION  
IN RUSSIA**





CHAPTER IX  
THE PARTY'S POLICY  
OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION  
AND THE ADOPTION OF THE BOLSHEVIKS'  
NEW AGRARIAN PROGRAMME

1. CORRECTNESS OF LENIN'S THEORY  
ON THE BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION  
GROWING INTO SOCIALIST REVOLUTION  
TESTED BY HISTORY

The second bourgeois-democratic revolution, achieved by the insurgent people in February 1917, completed the first historical stage of the heroic struggle of the working class and working peasantry against the Russian monarchy, that stronghold of brutal internal reaction and external imperialist policy. But although it ended in the overthrow of the monarchy, the February Revolution did not solve a single social or economic problem that had been brought to the fore by the revolutionary struggle of the working class and working peasantry.

The question naturally arose of what was to follow. What direction should the revolution take? Three trends immediately emerged (a) the bourgeois parties said that the revolution should turn Russia into a bourgeois monarchical state (b) the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries wanted a bourgeois parliamentary republic on West-European lines and (c) the Bolsheviks, until Lenin arrived, were in the main keeping to their former tactics for building a democratic republic with dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

Up to the time of Lenin's return from abroad the Bolsheviks did not have a sufficiently clear and firm tactical line. Even the Party leaders sometimes gravitated towards Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary tactics. Only after Lenin's arrival in Russia did the Bolshevik Party acquire a clear political and economic programme and arm itself with a new strategic and tactical line aimed at carrying out a socialist revolution.

While still in emigration, as soon as he received the first news of the February events in Russia, Lenin brilliantly defined the new stage in the development of the Russian revolution. In his famous works Farewell Letter to the Swiss Workers, Letters from Afar,

*Letters on Tactics* and *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution* Lenin formulated the Bolsheviks' new tactical line and charted the course for the further development of the Russian revolution. He expounded this new line with particular clarity on his return to Russia in the famous April Theses (*The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution*). The depth of theoretical analysis, the precision of the assessment of the correlation of class forces, the boldness and resolution with which the objectives were set had a shattering effect on Russia's political alignments and at the same time cast a gleam of sunlight on the international and internal situation.

*Lenin's first thesis* showed the course the revolution would take. "The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution—which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie—to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants."<sup>1</sup>

*Lenin's second thesis* formulated the extremely important proposition concerning the new type of state that would be created after the proletariat and poorest peasants took power. Here we can fully appreciate Lenin's creative approach to the theory of Marxism. "Not a parliamentary republic—to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step—but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom."<sup>2</sup>

In his theses Lenin set forth the general line to be taken by the Bolshevik Party in the revolution. The old formula of "dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" was replaced by the new one—"dictatorship of the proletariat and poorest peasants", and the former demand for a democratic republic was replaced by the new one of a Soviet socialist state on the model of the Paris Commune. This in its turn required that the revolution's economic programme should also be expanded to include measures amounting to practical steps towards socialism. In defining the policy of socialist revolution Lenin proceeded from the new conditions, which had made the epoch of the second revolution very different from that of the first.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, Moscow, 1964, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23.

Above all, the new international situation created by the imperialist war had brought many European countries besides Russia to the threshold of socialist revolution. The war, Lenin pointed out by fully revealing the contradictions of capitalism had, "pushed us a good thirty years ahead. It has forced on Europe universal labour service and the compulsory syndication of undertakings, caused hunger and unprecedented ravages in the leading countries, and imposed steps towards socialism"<sup>1</sup>.

This conclusion followed from Lenin's all-round consideration of the economic conditions generated by period of imperialism, which preceded the socialist revolution. "The dialectics of history is such that the war, by extraordinarily expediting the transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism, has *thereby* extraordinarily advanced mankind towards socialism."<sup>2</sup> Explaining this thought, Lenin pointed out that it was not the war in itself that had given birth to socialism—socialism grew out of economic conditions in one or another form—but that the war had unusually accelerated the processes of historical development, exposed the class contradictions and given rise to state-monopoly capitalism, which "is a complete *material* preparation for socialism, the *threshold* of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism *there are no intermediate rungs*."<sup>3</sup>

But in formulating his new revolutionary platform, Lenin proceeded not only from the international situation, which had created favourable conditions for socialist revolution in Europe. He first weighed all the factors and circumstances that bore a direct relation to Russia. Since the outbreak of war Lenin had taken into account the fundamental change in the international situation and right up to the February Revolution of 1917, had kept to his previous standpoint—Russia should become a democratic republic in the form of dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. And when Trotsky in 1915 declared that Russia was already on the threshold of socialist revolution, Lenin resolutely rejected this mistaken claim.

In his article "On the Two Lines in the Revolution", published in November 1915, he wrote that in Western Europe the objective conditions for socialist revolution had indeed ripened, but that

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "From a Publicist's Diary", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, Moscow, 1964, p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

Russia, while taking advantage of the favourable factors, should first of all complete a democratic revolution. "Trotsky has not realised that if the proletariat induce the non-proletarian masses to confiscate the landed estates and overthrow the monarchy, then that will be the consummation of the 'national bourgeois revolution' in Russia; it will be a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry!"<sup>1</sup>

And only after the overthrow of the monarchy, when the political situation in Russia had obviously changed, when the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies had in effect become the organ of dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, only then did it become clear that for Russia the epoch of bourgeois-democratic revolution had already passed. Now it was the turn of the socialist revolution and this was substantiated in the April Theses. Furthermore, Lenin also kept in mind the fact that the socialist revolution in Russia stood the best chance of success because the whole bourgeois world was split into two hostile camps and could not at once mount a united front against revolutionary Russia.

While giving precedence to the socialist revolution and the establishment of dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin did not, however, discard the possibility of putting into effect the old slogan of dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. After the February Revolution an extremely complex and specific situation had arisen in Russia that could not have been foreseen and that was unique in the history of revolutions. "The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a *dual power*. This fact must be grasped first and foremost: unless it is understood, we cannot advance. We must know how to supplement and amend old 'formulas', for example, those of Bolshevism, for while they have been found to be correct on the whole, their concrete realisation *has turned out to be* different. *Nobody* previously thought, or could have thought, of a dual power."<sup>2</sup>

Lenin went on to explain what had happened. The proletariat had undoubtedly been in a position to continue the revolution from overthrow of the monarchy to the socialist revolution, to the winning of state power. But at this decisive stage the proletariat had not had truly revolutionary Marxist leadership. As a result, the petty-bourgeois wave overwhelmed the revolution and numerically and ideologically crushed the advanced, politically conscious

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On the Two Lines in the Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 419.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Dual Power", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 38.

forces of the proletariat. And it was this "fusion" of the masses, regardless of class distinction, along with the direct betrayal by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, that had brought the revolution to equilibrium of the two forces: the bourgeois Provisional Government of the Constitutional-Democrats, Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which were also headed by Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries.

In this situation the main task was to eliminate the dual power, which was dangerous to the development of the revolution, and to get the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies to take full power into their own hands. But since these Soviets were dominated by peasants, soldiers and generally petty-bourgeois elements, the best form of expressing this power was dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. It was quite possible that these workers and peasants Soviets would be able to break their ties with the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and the conciliatory parties and carry the revolution forward. In the situation as it was at that time "it is quite possible. But, in assessing a given situation, a Marxist must proceed *not* from what is possible, but from what is real.

"And the reality reveals the fact that freely elected soldiers' and peasants' deputies are freely joining the second, parallel government, and are freely supplementing, developing and completing it. And, just as freely, they are surrendering power to the bourgeoisie..."<sup>1</sup>

It was this specific situation that made it essential to keep for a certain historical period the previous slogan of dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, so that there should be no skipping over the as yet uncompleted bourgeois-democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. Lenin weighed all the circumstances very carefully and assessed the alignment of class forces that had come about after the February Revolution. Checking and re-checking the correctness of his policy of socialist revolution, he asked whether there was not a danger of falling victim to subjectivism since the bourgeois-democratic revolution was as yet not completed. To this question he gave an answer after the April conference of Bolsheviks.

He wrote: "I might be incurring this danger if I said: "No Tsar, but a *workers'* government. But I did *not* say that, I said something else. I said that there *can be no* government (barring a bour-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Letters on Tactics", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 48.

geois government) in Russia *other than* that of the Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies. I said that power in Russia now can pass from Guchkov and Lwow *only* to these Soviets. And in these Soviets, as it happens it is the peasants, the soldiers, i. e. petty bourgeoisie, who preponderate....

"In my thesis I absolutely ensured myself against skipping over the peasant movement, which has not confined itself, for the petty-bourgeois movement in general, against any *playing* at seizure of power by a workers' government, against any kind of Blanquist adventurism....

"In the thesis, I very definitely reduced the question to one of *a struggle for influence within the Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies*"<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, Lenin noted, it was not yet known whether there could be in Russia a special kind of revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry divorced from the bourgeois government. Revolutionary tactics, he said, cannot be based on the unknown. But if such a thing should happen, then there would be only one path for the further development of the revolution: "...an immediate, resolute, and irrevocable separation of the proletarian communist elements from the petty-bourgeois elements....

"Only the consolidation of the proletarians who are free from the influence of the petty bourgeoisie in deed and not only in word can make the ground so hot under the feet of the petty bourgeoisie that it will *be obliged* under certain circumstances to take the power...."

Lenin saw a real possibility of peaceful transference of power to the revolutionary people by winning over the Soviets to the side of the proletariat. He firmly maintained this tactical line until the July events, until the forces of the bourgeois Provisional Government had shown themselves to be preponderant over the *de facto* government, the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies. After the July events the dual power began to decline. With the help of the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries the bourgeoisie tipped the balance. At the same time the objective situation and argument of class forces favoured a socialist revolution when the working class and the poorest sections of the peasantry swung into action to eliminate the forces of counter-revolution.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

The characteristic feature of the period between February and July 1917 was that the mass of the people, particularly the peasants, had moved sharply *to the left*, away from the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, and were beginning to support the revolutionary programme adopted by the Bolshevik Party at its Seventh (April) Conference. This leftward trend of the peasantry showed itself not only in the growing mass agrarian movement but also in the extreme revolutionary demands for a solution to the land question.

As the revolution developed, a mighty force was irresistibly emerging in the shape of the growing alliance between the proletariat and the poorest peasantry, an alliance capable of curbing the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and its Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary conciliators. In the course of this deep-going and complex process the question of the land came to be increasingly regarded as intimately linked with the question of peace and what kind of government the country should have. The peasant masses were now being convinced of the correctness of this line in practice.

Lenin's agrarian programme, approved by the Seventh (April) Bolshevik Conference, did a lot to clarify the minds of the advanced, most active section of the peasants and rally them around the proletariat and its vanguard, the Bolshevik Party. Added to this, the bourgeois government's counter-revolutionary policy and the treacherous role of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries was accelerating the swing of the peasant masses towards decisive revolutionary action.

The whole objective course of development of the revolution made it clear that "now, after the experience of July 1917, it is the revolutionary proletariat that must independently take over state power. Without that the victory of the revolution is *impossible*. The only solution is for power to be in the hands of the proletariat, and for the latter to be supported by the poor peasants or semi-proletarians".<sup>1</sup>

## 2. LENIN'S AGRARIAN PROGRAMME AT THE STAGE OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

The second bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia once again brought the agrarian and peasant question into the forefront of acute political struggle. As during the first revolution, all the

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On Slogans", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 169.

bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties seized upon it in an attempt to capture the initiative in the tug-of-war for the peasant masses. Once again the press was full of programmes, platforms, theories and projects for solving the agrarian question. All these projects, however, despite their various different shades, had one aim in common. They were all designed to impose on the peasants yet another agrarian reform that did not affect the foundations of the bourgeois and landowner system.

In this new situation the task of the Marxist working-class party was to paralyse the actions of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, deprive them of commanding influence over the peasant masses, and disrupt and defuse the plans and intentions of the united forces of reaction. The Bolsheviks were the only party in Russia that not only consistently defended the vital interests of the working peasants but also had a scientifically-grounded agrarian programme suited to the new, socialist stage of the revolution.

The basic propositions of the Bolsheviks' new agrarian programme were clearly formulated in Lenin's April Theses, and were later made specific in the historic decisions of the Seventh All-Russia Party Conference, which in April 1917 unanimously approved Lenin's agrarian programme providing the formula for socialist revolution in Russia.

We must remember that *the new agrarian programme differed essentially from the second agrarian programme, not only in basic theory but also in its political direction.* This is quite understandable because the period of the second revolution differed radically from that of the first. The Party had to take into consideration the new situation and the new revolutionary experience of the masses. "At the present time the revolution poses the agrarian question in Russia in an immeasurably broader, deeper, and sharper form than it did in 1905 to 1907."<sup>1</sup>

In this connection we shall consider the basic propositions advanced by Lenin in his *third* agrarian programme, which was later concretised and became a component part of the second Party Programme, approved by the Eighth Congress of the RCP(B) in 1919.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907", Postscript, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, Moscow, 1962, p. 430.



*A. Immediate Confiscation of the Large Estates  
and Nationalisation of All Land*

At first sight these two demands seem to present nothing new. After all, they had been the main demands in Lenin's second agrarian programme. But analysis shows that confiscation and nationalisation were now proposed on a different basis and pursued different socio-economic and political aims. *First*, confiscation of privately-owned land was now to be carried out not by peasants' committees but by Soviets of Agricultural Labourers, Poor People's, Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies, which were the embryonic organs of state power; *second*, nationalisation of the land was viewed not in the framework of a bourgeois-democratic republic but in that of a socialist republic of Soviets, a proletarian dictatorship.

This was the *fundamentally new element* that was now introduced into the concept of land confiscation and nationalisation. "Under these circumstances, the question of the nationalisation of the land must inevitably be presented in a new way, in the agrarian programme, namely: nationalisation of the land is not only 'the last word' of the bourgeois revolution, but also *a step toward socialism*." <sup>1</sup>

Now this thesis of Lenin's became the guiding line of the Bolshevik Party. J. V. Stalin, who at the Fourth Congress of the RSDLP had been an active supporter of the razdelists, later described the situation as follows: "It was only some time later, when Lenin's theory that the bourgeois revolution in Russia must grow into the socialist revolution became the guiding line of the Bolshevik Party, that disagreements on the agrarian question vanished in the Party; for it became evident that in a country like Russia—where the specific conditions of development had prepared the ground for the growth of the bourgeois revolution into the socialist revolution—the Marxist Party could have no other agrarian programme than that of land nationalisation"<sup>2</sup>.

In the first place Lenin proposed the immediate, decisive and complete confiscation of all privately-owned land, expropriation of the landowners, nobles and tsarist dignitaries, abolition of all social privileges and sweeping away all the rubbish of medieval relationships. "...The peasant mass *can* bring the inevitable and

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> J. V. Stalin, Author's Preface to Volume One, *Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1952, p. XIV.

matured agrarian upheaval to the point of *confiscating* all the immense holdings of the nobility."<sup>1</sup> In the resolute execution of this measure he saw the chief means of developing the revolutionary energy of the peasant masses and transforming the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution.

Before his departure for Russia, Lenin wrote in his farewell letter to the Swiss workers: "Russia is a peasant country, one of the most backward of European countries. Socialism *cannot* triumph there *directly* and *immediately*. But the peasant character of the country, the vast reserve of land in the hands of the nobility, *may*, to judge from the experience of 1905, give tremendous sweep to the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia and *may* make our revolution the *prologue* to the world socialist revolution, a *step* toward it."<sup>2</sup>

After his return to Russia, Lenin got down to the job of organising the revolutionary forces of the peasantry and proposed immediate arbitrary seizure of the landed estates in a strictly organised and disciplined manner. He showed why this was necessary not only in Party documents but also in direct appeals to the peasants. For example, in an open letter to the delegates of the All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies in May 1917 Lenin resolutely rejected the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary principle that the peasants should not encroach on the landed estates but should wait for the Constituent Assembly to meet. He advised the peasants to take the land without waiting for the Constituent Assembly or being tempted by promises of reform. He said: "*If you wait until the law is written, and yourselves do not develop revolutionary initiative, you will have neither the law nor the land.*"<sup>3</sup>

Why did Lenin press so hard for immediate abolition of the big estates? Because, if they were preserved, they would harbour a real danger of restoration of the monarchy. A warning of this danger was given in the decisions of the Seventh Party Conference: "The existence of landed estates in Russia is the material bulwark of the power of the feudal landlords and surely of possible restoration of the monarchy. This form of landownership inevitably condemns the overwhelming mass of Russia's population, the peasantry, to

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Farewell Letter to the Swiss Workers", *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, Moscow, 1964, p. 371.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the RSDLP(B)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 285.

poverty, oppression and humiliation, and the whole country to backwardness in all spheres of life".<sup>1</sup>

The Party had already made an indictment of the landed estates in its first agrarian programme. Now there was a real opportunity of abolishing them forever. A different position was adopted by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who proclaimed in one voice that the landed estates would inevitably fall apart and thus presented no danger to the revolution. These ideologists tried to prove that peasant landownership was gradually swallowing up the big estates, that the latter were doomed by a natural process. In a word, their line fitted perfectly with Stolypin's approach. And on this they built their tactics of conciliation.

Exposing the reformist ideology of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, Lenin showed that for the country's productive forces to develop freely there would have to be a fundamental reorganisation of all Russian landownership. The decision passed by the Bolsheviks' April Conference stated: "Peasant landownership in Russia, both allotted land (communal and individual), and private (rented and purchased land), is wholly and completely enmeshed in the old, semi-feudal bonds and relations, the division of peasants into categories inherited from the time of serfdom, strip farming, and so on and so forth. The need to break down all these obsolete and harmful barriers, the need to 'unfence' the land, to reorganise all landowning and farming relationships in a way suited to the new conditions of the Russian and world economy forms the material basis for the peasants' desire to nationalise all the land in the country."<sup>2</sup>

But while advocating an immediate takeover of land by the peasantry, Lenin explained that this should on no account imply making the land their property. Yes, *the lands of the nobility should immediately be given to the peasants but the right of landownership should remain with the people.* Moreover, he drew attention to yet another condition that had to be observed—close alliance between the poor peasants and the urban proletariat. Unity of these forces was essential not only for complete destruction of the old class privileges but also for a resolute struggle against the bourgeoisie and for ending its political and economic domination.

Guided by Lenin's instructions, the April Conference of the Bolsheviks proposed the following demands in its resolution on the agrarian question *first*, "the proletarian Party shall fight with all

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 1, p. 442.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

its strength for immediate and complete confiscation of all landed estates in Russia (including crown, church, cabinet, and so on)"; second, "the Party resolutely advocates immediate transference of all lands to the peasantry organised into Soviets of Peasants' Deputies or into other organs of local government that have been elected in a truly democratic fashion and are completely independent of the landowners and officials"; and third, "the Party advises the peasants to take the land in an organised manner, allowing no damage to property and taking care to increase production."<sup>1</sup>

In proposing the slogan of confiscation of the landed estates Lenin always regarded this demand as an inseparable part of the main programme demand—*abolition of private landownership and nationalisation of all land*. Moreover, the Party took into consideration the fact that under Russian conditions the demand for land nationalisation had an attraction for the majority of the working peasantry, who saw this demand purely and simply as a call for abolition of the big estates. In the 10-12 years that had passed since the first revolution this demand had by no means faded out of the peasants consciousness. It had grown even more insistent.

*The peasant had come to understand the need for abolition of the big estates through his vision as a practical farmer, he had realised in economic terms how bad they were not only for him but for the whole country.* The peasant learned of the enormous harm that was being done by private landownership from the extortionate payments that he had to make and that were growing every year. So the demand for the abolition of private property in land and nationalisation of all land stemmed not so much from theoretical considerations as from the desire of the peasants themselves who were fighting to *unfence* all lands, to redistribute them among peasants and build new land relationships in the countryside. Nationalisation meant "a reallocation of all the land".<sup>2</sup>

A most favourable opportunity had now arisen for accomplishing this. The situation throughout the country had changed radically since the time of the first revolution. Capital had "bourgeoisified" farming in Russia. It had penetrated the remotest corners of rural life. The Stolypin reform had helped to adapt Russian agriculture to capitalist development. The war had intensified the

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 1, pp. 443, 444.

<sup>2</sup> See V. I. Lenin, "The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the RSDLP(B)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 284.

class struggle and placed the transfer of power to the working class and the poor peasantry on the agenda. It was the war and subsequent revolution that had presented the possibility of carrying out a programme of steps towards socialism.

One such step was the nationalisation of the land. Now, in contrast to the period of the first revolution, land nationalisation inevitably assumed a different character in the agrarian programme. From being a step towards developing capitalism in agriculture it became a powerful means of developing the socialist revolution in the rural areas. Now land nationalisation was merely the last word of the "bourgeois revolution"; it was also a step forward, to socialism. *As the socialist revolution approached, land nationalisation was to be a heavy blow not against just one form of private property, but against all private ownership of the instruments and means of production in general.* The Bolsheviks' April Conference proved the need for a resolute struggle to carry out the Leninist programme of land nationalisation as a measure leading to deep-going socialist changes in the countryside.

Besides the profound substantiation of this demand in the political part of the programme the conference highlighted two specific and extremely important points: *[first]* "the Party of the proletariat demands nationalisation of all land in the country; while implying as it does transference of the right of ownership of all land to the state, nationalisation places the right to manage the land in the hands of the local democratic institutions"; *[second]* "all agrarian changes in general can be successful and lasting only given complete democratisation of the whole state, that is to say, on the one hand, abolition of the police, the regular army and privileged officialdom and, on the other hand, the broadest local self-government completely free of surveillance and tutelage from above".<sup>1</sup>

Lenin pointed out that land nationalisation would entail an extensive development of the class struggle. Of course, the class struggle was bound to deepen even if other means of solving the land question were adopted—sharing out the land among the peasants, putting it in the hands of the municipalities, socialisation, and so on. However, if such solutions were applied, the outcome would be less favourable for the rural proletariat and the poor peasants. Only if the land was nationalised would the class struggle sweep through the whole country.

After abolition of the landed estates the rural bourgeoisie, hoping to gain a dominant position in agriculture, would inevitably

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 1, pp. 443-44.

clash with the rural poor. The fruits of the victory of the rural proletariat and poor peasantry would depend on the outcome of this struggle. The decision of the April Conference states: "The more decisive and consistent the abolition of the big estates, the more decisive and consistent will be the bourgeois-democratic agrarian transformation in Russia in general, the greater the force and speed of the development of the class struggle of the agricultural proletariat against the well-to-do peasantry (peasant bourgeoisie)." <sup>1</sup>

*B. Organisation of the Rural Proletariat into  
an Independent Class Force*

The main objective of the Bolsheviks' agrarian programme at all stages of the revolution was to develop the class struggle in the countryside, to awaken the revolutionary initiative and political consciousness of the peasant masses, to win them over to the working class and ensure their victory in the struggle for socialism. Proceeding from a scientific analysis of the class stratification of the countryside, the Party defined for each stage the correct policy of relations between the working class and the various social strata of the peasantry. This was enormously important in aligning the working masses of the countryside with the proletariat.

Although the Bolsheviks' agrarian programme was mainly concerned with solving the "peasant question" as a whole, the Party always stressed its strictly class orientation. In the first revolution, and even more so in the second, the Party's main task was to attract the agricultural proletariat to the side of the socialist revolution, to organise it and make it the vanguard force of the whole working peasantry. This was the section of the rural population that took the hardest knocks from capital and owing to its economic and political position was ready to wage an all-out struggle for its emancipation shoulder to shoulder with the urban proletariat.

Lenin was firmly convinced that the rural proletariat, which had a vital interest in the victory of proletarian dictatorship, would be a reliable bulwark of Soviet power, a driving belt for the broad working masses of the countryside, and their steadfast defender against the kulaks and village moneybags. But organising the rural

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 443.

proletariat and poor peasants into an independent class force involved tremendous difficulties. Their extreme backwardness, their being scattered in small groups or even as individuals, their direct dependence on exploiters owing to the existence of an enormous reserve army of labour in the countryside, the lack of organisers—all this intensified the difficulties of the Party's work in the rural areas and required that the urban proletariat should give its assistance.

Lenin's great contribution was that in his earliest works he had clearly defined the specific class interests of the rural proletariat, its massive role both in the general democratic and in the socialist movement. Although there had been no specific demands in the Party's first agrarian programme in favour of hired agricultural labourers, because they were covered by the general demands on the working-class question, Lenin was already drawing the attention of Social-Democracy to the need to not only promote by every means the unity of the urban proletariat but to rally all the proletarianised elements of the countryside around it. Even then he clearly saw the "process of the final *separation of the rural proletariat* from the land-holding peasantry, the process of the development of proletarian class-consciousness in the countryside".<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the first Russian revolution Lenin proposed one of the main programme demands—organisation of the rural proletariat. This demand was written down for the first time in a resolution of the Third Party Congress and later formulated in Lenin's second agrarian programme. The programme stated: "...The object of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in all circumstances, and whatever the situation of democratic agrarian reform, is steadily to strive for the independent class organisation of the rural proletariat; to explain that its interests are irreconcilably opposed to those of the peasant bourgeoisie; to warn it against being tempted by small-scale ownership, which cannot, so long as commodity production exists, abolish poverty among the masses; and lastly, to urge the necessity for a complete socialist revolution as the only means of abolishing all poverty and all exploitation."<sup>2</sup>

The role of the agricultural proletariat and semi-proletariat, organised as an independent class force, is particularly important

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Reply to Criticism of Our Draft Programme", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 445.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, Moscow, 1962, p. 195.

in a socialist revolution. And the Party had now set this task as one of the most important parts of its practical work. Its urgency was due to the specific circumstances shaped by the second revolution. In this revolution the balance of class forces had tipped sharply in favour of the revolutionary people. The superiority of its forces was so great that the monarchy was overthrown and democratic freedoms were introduced at one stroke. In effect, a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry was set up at once, after the February Revolution. Its organ was the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, but this Soviet voluntarily, of its own accord, handed over power to the bourgeois Provisional Government.

Why did this happen? Lenin gave an exhaustive answer to this question. One reason was lack of political consciousness and organisation among the urban and particularly the agricultural proletariat, who allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the petty-bourgeois element. But the main reason lay in the betrayal of the interests of the working people by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionary leaders. "...Instead of clarifying the minds of the workers, they are *befogging* them; instead of dispelling petty-bourgeois illusions, they are *instilling* them; instead of freeing the people from bourgeois influence, they are *strengthening* that influence."<sup>1</sup> To the question of what conditions were helping to befog the workers' consciousness and what was preventing them from shaking off bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influence, Lenin replied: "It was this fusion of the masses, proletarian and non-proletarian, regardless of class differences within the masses...."<sup>2</sup>

Under these circumstances the Party was naturally confronted with a second question: *how could the proletariat and poor peasants be freed of the fog of defensism, how could they be liberated, and with them the whole mass of the peasants, from the influence of the bourgeoisie, how could the revolution be pressed forward?* Clear and well-grounded replies to these urgent questions are to be found in Lenin's April Theses, in his works *The Dual Power* and *Letters on Tactics*, and also in the historic documents of the Seventh All-Russia Conference of Bolsheviks.

These works and documents clearly defined the extremely complex task that had emerged from the conditions of development of Russia's second revolution. This task was to separate the proletarian class elements within revolutionary democracy—the already

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Dual Power", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Letters on Tactics", *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 54.



virtually existing dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. "A new and different task now faces us: to effect a split *within* this dictatorship between the proletarian elements (the anti-defencist, internationalist, 'Communist' elements, who stand for a transition to the commune) and the *small proprietor* or *petty-bourgeois* elements..."<sup>1</sup> How could one push the petty bourgeoisie into power, Lenin asked, if it was already able to take power but did not wish to do so. "This can be done only by separating the proletarian, the Communist, party, by waging a proletarian class struggle *free from* the timidity of those petty bourgeois."<sup>2</sup>

The task of making the rural proletariat into a true and reliable stronghold of the Communist Party in the countryside was naturally given prominence. Besides it should be remembered that in the 10 or 12 years that had passed since the first revolution this class had greatly changed. It had grown in numbers, and gained in political and organisational strength. In 1917 the army of hired agricultural labourers numbered no less than seven million. *This numerous proletarian stratum in the countryside had passed through the school of class struggle and along with the poor peasants constituted an enormous political force in the battle for the victory of socialism.* In the campaign for establishing general democratic freedoms the Bolshevik Party might have allies among the petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois parties (for example, Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks), but the Bolsheviks were alone when it came to pressing home the class struggle in the villages. No other party could accept such a programme. The development of this struggle was the wry thing all the other parties most feared.

Now that he had brought out the slogan of separating the proletarian elements from the petty-bourgeois, Lenin in his "Draft Platform of the Proletarian Party" proposed working out the organisational forms that would help to instil socialist consciousness among the rural proletariat and poor sections of the peasantry. And with Lenin's principle to guide it, the Party produced organisational forms that became widespread throughout the country.

[*The first form*] was the organisation of the rural proletariat and poor peasants within the Soviets, the embryonic organs of worker and peasant power. For this purpose it was proposed that where necessary special Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies and special Soviets of Poor Peasants should be set up. This measure was designed not to split the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, to

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

which the Party was giving all-round support, but to strengthen the proletarian class influence in them and help to dispel petty-bourgeois illusions fostered by the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary ideologists.

"To carry on this work, it is necessary to organise separately the proletarian elements (agricultural labourers, day-labourers, etc.) *within* the general peasant Soviets, or (sometimes *and*) set up separate Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies.

"Our object is not to scatter forces; on the contrary, in order to strengthen and broaden the movement, we must arouse the '*lowest*'—to use the terminology of the landowners and capitalists—section of society, or, more correctly, class.

"To build up the movement, we must free it from the influence of the bourgeoisie; we must try to rid it of the inevitable weaknesses, vacillations and mistakes of the petty bourgeoisie."<sup>1</sup>

A decision of the Bolsheviks' April Conference points out the need "to immediately and everywhere begin the separate and independent organisation of the agricultural proletariat both in the form of Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies (and also special) Soviets of Semi-proletarian Peasants' Deputies and in the form of organisation of proletarian groups or factions in the general Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, in all organs of local and urban administration, and so on and so forth".<sup>2</sup>

The second form of organising the rural proletariat and poor peasants was the creation throughout the country of large-scale socialised farms functioning under the control of Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies. As Lenin saw it, the proletarian forces in the rural areas were to be united *on an economic as well as a political basis*. With his profound understanding of the rural proletariat's economic interests Lenin was speaking on its behalf when he said: "If the land becomes the property of the whole people tomorrow—and it certainly will, because the people want it too—then where do we come in? Where shall we, who have no animals or implements, get them from? How are we to farm the land? How must we protect our interests? How are we to make sure that the land, which will belong to the whole people, which will really be the property of the nation, should not fall *only* into the hands of *proprietors*? If it falls into the hands of those who own enough animals and implements, shall we gain anything by

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Congress of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 1, p. 444.

it? Is that what we made this great revolution for? Is that what we wanted?"<sup>1</sup>

All these vital questions were fully answered by Lenin's agrarian programme, in which the Party recommended the poor peasants to join together on an economic basis as well, using the big estates for this purpose. "There is only one way to escape the yoke of capitalism and ensure that the people's land goes to the *working people*, and that is by organising the agricultural labourers..."<sup>2</sup> This would protect their interests against the rich peasants, who would inevitably seek an alliance with the capitalists and landowners.

The *third form* of organisation of the agricultural proletariat, which the Party proposed after the April Conference, was to set up trade unions of agricultural labourers in the countryside. At the beginning of July 1917, during the All-Russia Trade Union Conference Lenin published two articles under the general heading, "The Need for an Agricultural Labourers' Union in Russia", in which he urged the urban proletariat to help the agricultural labourers to unionise in defence of their class interests.

While indicating the great difficulties of organising the agricultural labourers because they were so backward, scattered and intimidated, he nevertheless believed that with the help of the urban proletariat this problem could be solved. "The urban workers have far more experience, knowledge, means and forces. *Some of their forces* should be directly used to *help* the rural workers on to their feet."<sup>3</sup> Lenin expressed the wish that "the all-Russia trade union conference will tackle this task with the greatest energy, will issue a call to all Russia and hold out a helping hand, the mighty hand of the organised vanguard of the proletariat, to the rural workers".<sup>4</sup>

### *C. Theoretical Reasons for Setting Up Two Types of Socialised Enterprise in Agriculture*

Lenin's earliest works revealed the objective laws leading to the socialist transformation of agriculture and showed the historical necessity of setting up a large-scale socialised economy in agricul-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 501.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 502.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Need for an Agricultural Labourers' Union in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 126.

ture. *Taking agrarian relations in Russia as a case in point, Lenin showed that the peasant masses' path to socialism had been prepared by a long historical build-up of objective factors and social forces that had undermined the old private-property forms of economy. And there had been a good many such forms in pre-revolutionary Russia.*

From bitter experience the peasants had learned what landlord and capitalist domination stood for in agriculture. They had themselves experienced land ownership, communal and individual, and finally they had tasted all the "delights" of bourgeois agricultural co-operation. All these forms of landownership, based on profound social antagonism, had led to a deep crisis in agriculture and brought the peasant masses of Russia to the brink of ruin.

Lenin's Bolshevik Party was the only party in Russia that besides consistently defending the interests of the working peasants, also had a scientific agrarian programme which indicated the right ways of solving the peasant question and fundamentally changing the whole system of agrarian relations throughout the country. The April Conference, which besides its programme demands for the confiscation and nationalisation of land also formulated a vital proposal on how to reorganise Russian agriculture on socialist lines, occupies a special place in this respect. Among its agrarian demands the conference proposed *two completely new points* concerning all-round support for the poor peasants in creating large-scale socialised enterprises in agriculture on the basis of the confiscated landed estates.

The *first point* read as follows: "The proletarian Party must advise the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians to organise every landed estate into a suitably large model farm to be run for the public account by the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies under the direction of agronomists and with the use of the best technical equipment available."<sup>1</sup> This point, which had first been proposed by Lenin in the new agrarian programme, was a definite step towards the socialist transformation of Russia's agriculture. Whereas in his first agrarian works Lenin had only theoretically substantiated the possibility of preserving the large-scale capitalist estates as a basis for future development of a socialised economy in agriculture, he now proposed as an urgent practical demand of the Party "the setting up of a model farm on each of the large estates (ranging in size from 100 to 300 dessiatines,

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<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 1, p. 444.

according to local and other conditions, and to the decisions of the local bodies) under the control of the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies and for the public account".<sup>1</sup>

The choice of this path was prompted by experience, by the essential needs of the working peasantry, who were seeking a way out of the extreme poverty and backwardness brought about by the whole system of bourgeois-landlord landowning. It was no accident that even in the years of the first Russian revolution the majority of the working peasants had wanted the land to be nationalised. From centuries of bitter experience they had realised that the system of big estates and capitalist farms was not for them. The demand of the mass of the working peasantry that private property in land be abolished and all land nationalised expressed their desire to build a new social and economic life in the countryside. After the February Revolution of 1917 the peasant movement revealed yet another characteristic feature—the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses in the rural areas were not only winning land in their struggle with the landowners but also attempting to organise socialised farming on the estates and socialised use of the confiscated implements.

Supporting the desire of the poor peasants to socialise the implements and processes of farming, Lenin said: "This is a matter of principle of tremendous significance.... Such a measure, which is doubtless quite practicable in a small village, inevitably leads to more sweeping measures. When the peasant comes to learn this—and he has already begun to learn it—the knowledge of bourgeois professors will not be needed; he will himself come to the conclusion that it is essential to utilise the agricultural implements, not only in the small farms, but for the cultivation of all the land."<sup>2</sup>

On this basis Lenin then proposed *supplementing the resolution with a second special point approving this splendid initiative of the working peasantry*. The conference resolution stated: "The Party must support the initiatives of the peasant committees that in a number of localities in Russia are placing the landowners' implements and animals in the hands of the peasants organised in these committees, for the socially regulated use of these implements and animals in the cultivation of all land."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 286.

<sup>3</sup> CPSU in *Resolutions and Decisions...*, Vol. 1, p. 444.

This new point in the agrarian programme, which called on the peasants to organise collective farms, was also a definite step towards socialism. The working peasants' incredible poverty, their pauperisation and ruination, and their desire to get themselves out of this desperate situation irresistibly drove them to break down and change the old land relationships in Russia. The material basis of life showed the peasants the way towards socialising implements and social cultivation of the land. "The dire need I speak of is precisely this—we cannot continue farming in the old way. If we continue as before on our small isolated farms, albeit as free citizens on free soil, we are still faced with imminent ruin..."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the historic decisions of the Seventh Party Conference on the agrarian question have a special theoretical and practical value. *They provide the first formulation of Lenin's idea of the need to set up in agriculture two types of socialised enterprise: state farms and collective farms bringing together the small and middle peasant producers.* Having defined the practical ways of making Russian agriculture socialist, Lenin a little later theoretically substantiated a second important proposition—the need to establish for a certain historical period two forms of social property: state and co-operative.

At the First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies in May 1917, Lenin gave a thorough substantiation of the Bolsheviks' agrarian programme and showed its historical necessity. The crisis of the old land relationships had become so acute that the peasant masses could not tolerate the situation any longer. They were demanding the abolition of private property and a fundamental land reform. This was the beginning of the great transformation which, as Lenin foresaw, "will go a long way forward and which, it may be said without exaggeration, will undoubtedly be brought to completion in Russia because there is no power that can stop it..."<sup>2</sup>

As a first step in this great transformation the Communist Party was to defend the interests of the propertyless and poor peasants. The agricultural labourers and poor peasants had to be organised as an independent class force capable, under working-class and Party leadership, of bridling the power of capital and ending exploitation and pauperisation in the countryside. "When alone,

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 503–04.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 501.

a poor man is helpless. No 'state' will help the rural wage-worker, the farm-hand, the day-labourer, the poor peasant, the semi-proletarian, *if he does not help himself*. The first step in this direction is independent class organisation of the rural proletariat."<sup>1</sup>

The *second step* was the transition to socialised cultivation of the land, to setting up large model farms operating with socialised implements and means of production and collective labour. The Party recommended "that every big economy, for example, every big landed estate, of which there are 30,000 in Russia, should be organised as soon as possible into a model farm for the *common* cultivation of the land jointly by agricultural labourers and trained agronomists, using the animals, implements, etc., of the landowner for that purpose".<sup>2</sup>

With its clear understanding of the laws of social economic development the Communist Party found and pointed out the only correct path for stimulating the productive forces in agriculture and liberating the working peasants from poverty and want. Lenin wrote of the poor peasants: "...They should be helped – and this particularly applies to the *poor peasants* – by means of collective cultivation of the large estates. There is *no* other way of helping the poor peasants."<sup>3</sup> And in another article of the same period he wrote: "We cannot conceal from the peasants, least of all from the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians, that small-scale farming under commodity economy and capitalism *cannot* rid humanity of mass poverty, that it is necessary to *think* about going over to large-scale farming conducted on public lines and to *tackle this job at once* by teaching the masses, and in turn *learning from the masses*, the practical expedient measures for bringing about such a transition."<sup>4</sup>

Lenin pointed out that the switching of small peasant farms to large-scale socialised production would signal a profound revolutionary upheaval that would forever rid the peasants of all forms of exploitation, poverty and ignorance. "...Such a change would be much more of a revolution than the overthrow of the weak-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Need for an Agricultural Labourers' Union in Russia", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, pp. 125–26.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 502.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On the 'Unauthorised Seizure' of Land", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 452.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Congress of Peasant Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 169.

minded Nicholas Romanov.”<sup>1</sup> Only a victorious socialist revolution, however, could set the stage for such a revolutionary upheaval in the countryside.

Even then, however, Lenin pointed out the extreme complexity and difficulty of such a transformation. He resolutely rejected the idea of coercing and expropriating the peasants, regarding this as reactionary and disastrous for the socialist revolution. Concerning the transition of the working peasantry to socialist forms of economy, he said: “...It would be madness of course for anybody to imagine that joint cultivation of the land can be decreed from above and imposed on people.... Tens of millions of people will not make a revolution to order, but will do so when driven to it by dire need, when their position is an impossible one, when the joint pressure and determination of tens of millions of people break down the old barriers and are actually capable of creating a new way of life.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, even before the Communist Party came to power it clearly formulated its line on the creation of large-scale socialised economies in agriculture and then, after the victory of the October Socialist Revolution, gradually but firmly and consistently started putting it into practice.

### 3. BANKRUPTCY OF THE MENSHEVIK AND SOCIALIST-REVOLUTIONARY AGRARIAN POLICY

In the ten years between the two Russian revolutions the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries had evolved politically away from their former revolutionary-democratic positions and finally taken the side of the most reactionary forces in the country. There was nothing surprising about this because the petty-bourgeois ideology that these parties had adopted was bound to bring them to positions hostile to the revolutionary proletariat and poor peasants.

Nevertheless it was a fact that both these parties in the period immediately after the second revolution still had considerable influence not only among the peasantry but also among a definite section of the working class. And the Bolsheviks had to make tremendous efforts to win the support of the masses and free them

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “First All-Russia Congress of Peasants’ Deputies”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 503.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 502–03.



from the influence of the bourgeois and particularly the petty-bourgeois parties. They were helped in this, however, by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries themselves, who by their anti-popular, anti-peasant policies completely forfeited the trust of the masses.

*In the first place*, both these parties clearly and definitely opposed the immediate confiscation of the landed estates and their handing over for use by the peasants on the grounds that expropriation of the landowners would lead to a further decline in agriculture, cause a civil war, and sabotage measures connected with continuation of the imperialist war. To please the bourgeoisie the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries unanimously supported the continuation of its reactionary policy and urged the peasants to live in peace with the landowners and obediently perform all their wartime duties.

*Secondly*, both these parties came out in favour of postponing a decision on the agrarian question until the Constituent Assembly. Both proposed solving the problem on the basis of reform. Neither the Mensheviks nor the Socialist-Revolutionaries had any intention of continuing the revolution and putting power in the hands of the workers and peasants. This is why they supported the proposals of the bourgeois parties for preparation of a land reform to complete the second revolution.

Both parties were in the throes of a profound internal political crisis, which was breaking them up into various groups and trends. Two trends, Right and Left, had developed in the Socialist-Revolutionary Party while the Menshevik Party under the influence of liquidationism had split into numerous factions. The deep contradictions between the leaders and the rank and file were undermining and destroying the integrity of these parties. *As a result, Menshevism from being an opportunist breakaway group had finally turned into an agency of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie, and the Socialist-Revolutionaries, once a party of revolutionary petty-bourgeois democracy, had become a bourgeois kulak party.*

#### *A. The Mensheviks as Allies of the Constitutional-Democrats and Defenders of the Landlords*

In their assessment of the second bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia the Mensheviks maintained the positions that they had adopted in the first revolution. They continued to assert that

the February Revolution was purely bourgeois and that power should therefore pass to the bourgeoisie. All the Menshevik literature of those days was imbued with a spirit of anti-socialist propaganda. Lenin's theory of socialist revolution, particularly the idea of an alliance between the working class and the working peasantry, was furiously attacked. The Mensheviks, above all, would have nothing to do with Lenin's idea that the bourgeois-democratic revolution should grow into a socialist revolution.

As their main arguments against this idea they produced the well-worn themes of Russia's economic and cultural backwardness, the fewness of her proletariat, and its inability to unite and lead all the progressive forces of Russia. So the only thing to do, according to the Mensheviks, was to back the bourgeoisie and form a coalition with them.

Judging the February Revolution by the same yardstick as they had used for the 1905-07 revolution, the Mensheviks transferred their former concepts bodily to the sphere of agrarian policy. Divided as they were organisationally into factions, the Mensheviks (of all shades) fell in completely with the bourgeois and landlord parties in the sphere of agrarian policy. They openly opposed confiscation of the big estates and their free transfer to the peasants. This thesis was recorded in the official decisions of all the Menshevik groups passed at their conferences, congresses and meetings, and also in the press.

The most reactionary stand on the agrarian question was taken by the Menshevik *Yedinstvo* (Unity) organisation headed by G. V. Plekhanov, which represented the extreme right wing of Russian Social-Democracy. This organisation had virtually abandoned its previous programme of "municipalisation" and now favoured the purchase of estate land and compensation of the landowners. The arguments for its position were given in a letter from Plekhanov to the All-Russia Peasant Congress published in the organisation's newspaper *Yedinstvo* (Unity).

This is what the letter said: "The idea of taking away the landed estates without compensation evokes objections. Let us imagine a big landowner. Because he possesses a large amount of land he is a rich man, but he is rich only while his land has not been taken from him. As soon as his land is taken without compensation he becomes a pauper. Admittedly, he may have money in the bank. In that case he will not perish if ... if he has enough money. But if he has no money, he will inevitably be reduced to pauperdom. And the same thing will happen to the great majority of other private landowners. Now, tell me, is it in your interests to

multiply pauperism in Russia? I think not. It is against your interests and against the interests of the whole country. Therefore, the private owners of land must be given a certain compensation. A modest one, of course."<sup>1</sup>

Here we have the logic of a renegade. No wonder Plekhanov's letter, according to the reminiscences of those who took part in the congress, remained a "voice crying in the wilderness". The Socialist-Revolutionary historian N. Y. Bykhovsky recalls that Plekhanov appealed to the peasants' magnanimity as victors. "But this letter made no impression on the congress participants. It was met by complete indifference because it fundamentally diverged from the mood of the peasants, which was expressed by the mass of delegates."<sup>2</sup>

Plekhanov's position in 1917 should be compared with his statements of 1892 when he was a Marxist revolutionary. "...We must not be content with any concession from the upper classes," he said. "We must always present the people with the maximum revolutionary demands that it has matured for at the time; we must tirelessly lead it forward, forward to the capture of enemy territory; we must not sheathe our swords until that territory is occupied to the last yard—what could be more definite than such a programme?"<sup>3</sup>

The position on the agrarian question of the other Mensheviks headed by their Organising Committee was no better. At the all-Russia conference of Mensheviks in May 1917 attention was again focussed on the agrarian question. The main report was given by P. Maslov, who also spoke in favour of partial compensation by means of a "property tax". Maslov categorically opposed agrarian disorders and peasant seizures, which were allegedly "threatening to develop into counter-revolution". The second report was made by Cherevanin, who proposed sticking to the principles of the old agrarian programme of municipalisation but also expressed doubts about its practical realisation.

The conference came out unanimously against unauthorised seizure of the estates by the peasants and urged them to wait for a new reform and the Constituent Assembly.

From this point of departure the Mensheviks proposed placing tight restrictions on the functions of the land committees. They

<sup>1</sup> *Yedinstvo* (Unity), No. 50, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> N. Y. Bykhovsky, *Vserossiiskiy sovet krestyanskikh deputatov* (The Russia Soviet of Peasants' Deputies), 1917, p. 94 (in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> G. Plekhanov, *Sochineniya* (Works), Vol. III, p. 142 (in Russian).

were assigned only the role of intermediaries for regulating relations between the landlords and the peasants: setting standards for rent and wages, maintaining a check against any unfair dealing, setting up "conciliation chambers" to consider land conflicts, and so on. Moreover, all these measures were to be conducted by the land committees "in agreement with the landowners". At the conference Maslov with the support of other Mensheviks insisted that the land committees should not be purely peasant but should represent all sections and classes of the population. The conference expressed its complete satisfaction with the regulations on the land committees issued by the Provisional Government, which stipulated that they must include representatives of the "whole population".

It was also characteristic that the Mensheviks had not a word to say about the role of the Soviets in solving the agrarian problem. The Soviets were also assigned a very restricted function. They were supposed to force the bourgeoisie "to the left", thus helping the bourgeois revolution to reach its culmination. In short, the role of the Soviets was reduced to maintaining a check on the bourgeois Provisional Government and exerting organised pressure on it. At the same time the Menshevik Organising Committee urged the Soviets to give the government energetic and direct assistance.

Nor did the Mensheviks' agrarian platform change at the Unity Congress of Social-Democrats, held in August 1917. The congress was attended by Menshevik Defencists, Menshevik internationalists and former Bolsheviks from *Novaya Zhizn* (New Life). Characteristically, Plekhanov and his Yedinstvo (Unity) group, which had taken up positions too far to the right, were not invited to the congress. Of course, no unification occurred and the congress produced no results. It considered three reports on the agrarian question. Judging by the theses that were published, the only differences of opinion were on matters of detail and in essentials all three reports justified purchase in one form or another and categorically rejected confiscation of the landed estates.

Maslov's theses stated: "The alienation of private lands must take place (a) on the basis of principles that do not undermine the state's credit-worthiness, that is, the payment of debts for the land and (b) on the basis of progressively diminishing compensation of landowners"<sup>1</sup>. Y. Piletsky's theses differed little from the first theses and their ultimate implications were the same: purchase and

<sup>1</sup> Dyen, (Day), 26 August 1917.

compensation. "The sums needed for payment of debts on the land are to be obtained by means of a special property state tax."<sup>1</sup> A justification of compensation was also to be found in the theses presented by Rozhkov. While considering himself an opponent of purchase he nevertheless spoke of "the need when confiscating the land to take into account the debts incurred, otherwise a financial crisis is inevitable. Compensation, though not in the form of purchase, must be made in some way."<sup>2</sup>

Despite their various reservations these reports all say the same thing: support the landowners and compensate them for their land, otherwise the whole class will be ruined and doomed to poverty and destruction. As for the peasants' urgent demands, the Menshevik leaders promised to satisfy them only after the war, when the Constituent Assembly was convened, but for the present this question was left unsolved. *All this testified to the profound political decay of Menshevism, which had become an agency of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and a defender of the reactionary landlords.*

#### *B. The Narodnik Parties Assume the Agrarian Positions of the Mensheviks and Constitutional-Democrats*

No less significant was the political evolution of the Narodnik parties. During the second revolution there were three: the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Popular Socialists, who in June 1917 merged with the Trudoviks, and the Maximalists. All these parties had taken shape organisationally during the first revolution. In the 12 years of their activities they had moved a long way to the right and clearly departed from their former revolutionary-democratic positions. After the second revolution these parties came close to the Mensheviks and Constitutional-Democrats.

Despite their nominal independence they were all united by a common petty-bourgeois ideology, which was incompatible with the Marxist view of the world. The astonishing theoretical muddle showed itself particularly in their denial of the class character of the state and their identification of the class interests of the proletariat, the peasantry and the intelligentsia, who were presented as one class of "working people". Their failure to understand the objective laws of socio-economic development and the correlation

<sup>1</sup> *Rabochaya Gazeta* (Workers' Gazette), 24 August 1917.

<sup>2</sup> *Novaya Zhizn*, 25 August 1917.

of class forces was clearly revealed in their assessment of the second revolution. All the Narodnik parties declared that this was not a bourgeois-democratic or a socialist revolution but a revolution of the whole people, that is, the revolution that Russia needed and that was to be the summit of her achievement.

Having given this incorrect assessment of the February Revolution, the Narodnik parties remained quite satisfied with the coup that had taken place and put their trust in the bourgeois Provisional Government. Regarding what had been achieved as quite sufficient, they thought socialism could be instituted by means of parliamentary legislation. The main role in these changes was assigned to the Constituent Assembly. Thus the political concepts of these parties fully coincided with the reformism of the Mensheviks, and this, of course, suited the Constitutional-Democrats and the Octobrist Party perfectly.

The Narodnik parties' political line determined their tactics on the agrarian question. Admittedly, their programme and tactical positions showed some shades of difference, but not over essentials. For this reason they made no changes in their political line and the direction of their activities. This was revealed by subsequent events, when all the Narodnik parties in collusion with the Mensheviks raised a united chorus in defence of ownership of the big estates.

The vanguard of the Narodnik parties was the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the largest party of them all. The Socialist-Revolutionaries claimed undivided leadership of the peasant masses and resorted to incredible devices of demagoguery, hypocrisy and direct deception to obtain it. Casting themselves in the role of defenders of the interests of the working peasantry, the Socialist-Revolutionaries solemnly asserted their loyalty to the principles of their former agrarian programme and launched massive agitation to get it recognised.

The Third Congress of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party held in Moscow at the end of May and beginning of June 1917 reaffirmed the basic programmatic propositions on "socialisation" of the land as the only way of solving the agrarian problem in Russia. This, however, was only a smokescreen. Having proclaimed their loyalty to the principles of the agrarian programme, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, like the Mensheviks, relegated its realisation to the distant future. *During the first revolution they had urged the peasants to seize the big estates, but now they appealed for reconciliation with the landlords and not allowing arbitrary seizure of their lands until the nation-wide Constituent Assembly was held.*

During the discussion of the agrarian programme the Socialist-Revolutionary leaders made statements that substantially revised the programme. In the first place, arguments were put forward for a new demand—to increase the “working quota of land use” for the landowners who were to be expropriated. They were also to be “temporarily” allowed to retain the ownership of woodlands, waters and mines, and to use hired labour under the pretext of preventing economic decline in agriculture. A second proposal envisaged possible compensation for confiscated land at government expense. Proposals were also made ruling out confiscation of the big estates without compensation. In any case seizure of land or any encroachment on the landed estates was to be forbidden until the Constituent Assembly met. Thirdly, the functions of the land committees were to be severely curtailed and assigned the role of guardians of the former land relationships.<sup>1</sup>

All this was reflected in two documents drawn up by two Socialist-Revolutionary leaders—“Instructions for the Land Committees” by V. Chernov, and “Draft Rules on Regulation of Land and Agricultural Relations by the Land Committees” by S. Maslov. Lenin’s response to this move was an article headed “Socialist-Revolutionary Party Cheats the Peasants Once Again”. Lenin wrote: “There is no trace of ‘socialisation’ in the bill (save perhaps for the ‘social’ help given the landlord in assuring him of his rent); there is not the least trace of anything ‘revolutionary or democratic’; there is in fact nothing at all in it....

“Let me say this again: it is a bill *to save* the landowners, and *to ‘pacify’* the incipient peasant uprising by making concessions on trifles and allowing the landowners to keep what is important.”<sup>2</sup>

The Socialist-Revolutionary leaders’ swing towards support for the owners of the big estates was so obvious that it evoked sharp protests from the Left wing of the congress. A Leftist trend was already taking shape in the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, and after the October Revolution this trend finally broke away from the party and formed a fourth Narodnik party, the party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. The Socialist-Revolutionary Party thus entered a profound political crisis caused by deep-going internal

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<sup>1</sup> See *Protokoly tretyego svezda partii sotsial-revolutsionerov, sostoyavshegosya v Moskve 25 maya-4 iyulya 1917 g. Stenografichesky otchet* (Minutes of the Third Congress of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, Moscow, 25 May-4 July 1917. Verbatim Report), Moscow 1917, p. 480 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Socialist-Revolutionary Party Cheats the Peasants Once Again”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, Moscow, 1964, pp. 232-33.

contradictions. Admittedly, its leaders did all they could to prevent a split or the public airing of differences. But in this they succeeded for only a short time.

In fulfilment of the congress decisions the Socialist-Revolutionary Party launched a broad campaign to publicise and explain their agrarian programme. Throughout the country Socialist-Revolutionary congresses, conferences and assemblies were held proclaiming their solidarity with the decisions of the Third Socialist-Revolutionary Congress. Numerous peasant meetings and assemblies held by the Socialist-Revolutionaries carried decisions and resolutions demanding the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, which would abolish private landownership and institute egalitarian use of the land. It must be admitted that the Socialist-Revolutionary agitation among the peasantry enjoyed great success at first. In fact, if one is looking for the causes of the weakness of the peasant movement in the first months after the February Revolution, one finds that it was to a certain extent the result of Socialist-Revolutionary demagoguery.

The party of the Popular Socialists took an even bigger swerve to the right. It totally renounced any revolutionary solution of the agrarian question and called on the peasants to regulate land relations on a peaceful basis. In his article "When You Hear the Judgement of a Fool...",<sup>1</sup> Lenin noted that the small owner was inherently afraid of radical measures and big upheavals and always preferred to settle matters peacefully, to buy his way out since he had some money in his pocket.<sup>1</sup> While formally recognising the need for land nationalisation, they wanted it to apply only to the big estates and to be conditional on purchase and compensation at "fair" prices. These "social-Cadets", as Lenin called them, were in full agreement with the punitive measures taken by the Provisional Government against arbitrary seizure of the landed estates.

Even V. Chernov's notorious instructions for the land committees, which had been firmly rejected by the Socialist-Revolutionary Left wing was too "revolutionary" for the Trudoviks. It was now quite difficult to distinguish them from the Cadets, the Constitutional-Democrats, who could have undersigned their agrarian programme without the slightest reservation. According to Lenin's definition, the Popular Socialist Party expressed the mentality of the opportunistic petty bourgeois.

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<sup>1</sup> See V. I. Lenin, "When You Hear the Judgement of a Fool...", *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, Moscow, 1962, pp. 469-70.



Now let us consider briefly the agrarian programme of the Maximalists, who represented the extreme Leftist trend among the Narodnik parties. First, they resolutely opposed land nationalisation on the grounds that this would reinforce the power of the bourgeoisie and the state. Their arguments dovetailed perfectly with those of the Mensheviks. At the same time they remained firmly opposed to the Socialist-Revolutionaries, who wanted to carry out their programme by means of legislation. The Maximalists were determined to socialise the land from below, by violent means, without purchase or compensation. In this respect the Maximalists stood firm by the former revolutionary-democratic traditions of Narodism.

These demands even exceeded those of their predecessors since they included immediate seizure not only of the land but also of the factories and mills by the local organisations—the land committees and Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies. They assigned a special role to the Soviets, which until such time as the Constituent Assembly met were to act as fully authorised bodies representing the will of the people. The Constituent Assembly was to come into the picture by confirming everything that the Soviets had done. Depending on how the Constituent Assembly behaved one could decide whether to continue the struggle or remain content with the results achieved.

Undoubtedly, the Maximalists stood further to the left than any of the other Narodnik parties. Unfortunately, they had no stable ideological and theoretical basis and could not pursue a consistent agrarian policy. Worse still, they had not the slightest notion of the laws of revolution and its motive forces. It was no accident that in practice they slid towards anarchist positions or merely went along with the other Narodnik parties. The Maximalists were a party of Left revolutionary phrase-mongering, extremely unstable in action and lacking any understanding of their ultimate goals.

To sum up, then, the second revolution in Russia was a serious test for all the petty-bourgeois parties. And when put to the test their agrarian programmes were found wanting. If these parties managed to remain on the surface, it was only thanks to their demagogic tricks, manoeuvring, opportunism and downright deception. A perfect example of such trickery was the behaviour of the Narodnik leaders at the first All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies (May 1917).

In his report the Popular Socialist theoretician Professor Oganovsky drew a shocking picture of the impoverishment of the

peasantry and how it was being shamelessly robbed by the landlords, nobility and merchants. But Oganovsky gave no reply to the question of how to escape from this appalling situation, on the grounds that the question was too complex and confused. The "right" to the land was one thing, he said, but it was a different matter how this right was to be granted.

A spokesman for the Socialist-Revolutionaries, S. Maslov,<sup>1</sup> also had a lot to say about peasant poverty, the need to solve the land question, and the delights of the coming agrarian reform, but for the present he proposed waiting, studying, evolving and so on. He was backed up by the next speaker, the Socialist-Revolutionary Vikhlyayev, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, who reported on the practical measures taken to solve the land question. What were these measures? It turned out that 20 commissions for drawing up an agrarian reform had been set up, that a secretariat had been organised, a time-table of sessions and conferences of these bodies arranged, and the most eminent (we must add, the most reactionary) experts in the country invited.

Another report was delivered by V. Chernov himself, the leader of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and the Minister of Agriculture. He promised the peasants all they could wish for on this earth—big additions of land and expansion of their sowing area. All they had to do was wait patiently for the end of the war and then the land would pass to the people. This unfenced land would give the working farmers a free hand so there would be "free labour on free land".

Finally the congress heard one of the Maximalist leaders, who also expounded his party's programme. He said that the Soviets were an embryonic form of socialist community life, and that they should immediately publish a decree on socialisation of the land and everything on it—factories, mills, mines, capital, and so on. He proposed taking all the measures that were needed to force the Constituent Assembly into a position of having to accept or reject them. The Constituent Assembly might represent the will of the people and it might not, the speaker concluded.

The peasants' deputies believed the promises of the Narodnik leaders. Only this can explain the fact that the Socialist-Revolutionaries and their partners succeeded in taking command of the

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<sup>1</sup> There were two Maslovs: Pyotr Maslov, the agrarian theoretician of the Mensheviks, the author of the land municipalisation project; and Sergei Maslov, the agrarian theoretician of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and author of the land socialisation project.

First Congress of Peasants' Deputies and persuading them to "wait a bit" and "put up with it a bit longer". The mandates that the deputies had brought to the congress were ignored. The peasants innocently believed that the Socialist-Revolutionary leaders and ministers were trying to solve the land question in their favour.

In their turn the leaders of all the Narodnik parties were lavish with promises and verbally agreed to all the wishes of the peasants as long as they would give up the idea of immediate confiscation of the landed estates and agree to vote for the Narodnik candidates in the Constituent Assembly. And it must be admitted that the Socialist-Revolutionaries and their allies succeeded in winning over the peasants' deputies. First, the congress almost unanimously elected Socialist-Revolutionary leaders to the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies; and secondly, the congress appealed to the peasants of the country to vote only for the candidates of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in the elections to the Constituent Assembly.

But the Socialist-Revolutionary leaders failed to keep their promise. Once they had gained ministerial positions, they did not satisfy the land demands of the toiling peasantry but, on the contrary, joined the Mensheviks in defending the bourgeoisie and the landlords and sending punitive detachments to the rural areas to pacify the peasants. The Socialist-Revolutionaries used the stick-and-carrot method to deceive the peasant masses. On the one hand they put the countryside at the mercy of the punitive detachments and, on the other, urged the peasants to expect the fulfilment of all their desires from the Constituent Assembly, for which no date had been fixed.

This treacherous policy of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and their supporters roused increasing anger and protest among the mass of the peasants, who were beginning to understand that the Socialist-Revolutionary land policy was sheer trickery. Under the influence of Bolshevik agitation in the countryside the peasant masses swung significantly to the left. They began to turn away from the Socialist-Revolutionaries and advanced increasingly revolutionary demands, allying themselves more and more closely with the working class and forming a united front under Bolshevik slogans.

## CHAPTER X

# THE AGRARIAN MOVEMENT BECOMES A REVOLUTIONARY PEASANT WAR AND MERGES WITH THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

## 1. FORMATION OF REVOLUTIONARY FORCES IN THE RURAL AREAS AND GROWTH OF THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF THE PEASANT MASSES

The overthrow of the monarchy had a tremendous revolutionising effect on the peasant masses and strengthened their belief in the need to continue the struggle for land, peace and freedom. The February Revolution paved the way for continuation of this struggle. It transformed the political situation in the countryside and awakened the lowest, most downtrodden and oppressed strata of the peasantry to political life.

The biggest factor in rousing the villages was the arrival of large numbers of members of various parties as agitators, propagandists and organisers, who started up wide-scale political activities among the peasants. They included many Bolsheviks, who set out to explain Lenin's agrarian programme. Particularly active in this propaganda work were the men from the front, who had returned to the villages either wounded or sick. In many cases they had been under powerful Bolshevik influence and, as a rule, had quite a good understanding of Lenin's agrarian programme.

Under the impact of these political forces a wide network of land committees was organised throughout the country in April and May 1917. The election of these committees was the first step on the road to political activation of the countryside. Although the committees were at first dominated by the upper crust of the peasantry and Socialist-Revolutionary intellectuals, the very fact of their being elected was undoubtedly of great political significance. The additional fact that the old police had been replaced by a people's militia, on electoral principles, also had considerable significance.

At the same time in all the various administrative areas—villages, volosts, uyezds and gubernias—Soviets of Peasants' Deputies began to appear and assumed the right to play a similarly leading

role in the rural areas as the Soviets of Workers' Deputies already enjoyed in the towns. During the spring and summer of 1917 the whole country became covered with a network of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies. These forums helped to mould the revolutionary consciousness of the working peasant and sharpen his understanding of the need for political unity and joint organisational efforts against his enemies, the landlords and bourgeoisie.

After the February Revolution, and particularly after the government's publication of the anti-Stolypin law, the land associations showed their greatest vitality. They not only regained their lost right (to unite in ownership of land) but also became unifying centres for the mass of working peasants.

Under the impact of the propaganda forces and also the developing activities of the new public agencies in the rural areas the peasants' land associations soon became a formidable organised force. Whereas at first these agencies had obediently carried out the directives of the Provisional Government, they now had to make a bid to satisfy the peasants' demands for land.

A significant fact was that the composition of the local Soviets of Peasants' Deputies and land committees had greatly changed. They had been reinforced with men returning from the front and the proletarian elements in the countryside. This reinforcement with the more advanced revolutionary forces boosted the organisational strength of the peasant associations and all the other agencies of self-government.

As their activity increased a turning point was reached in the revolutionary agrarian movement. Instead of the individual and group attacks on privately-owned estates that had occurred in the first months after the February Revolution, the peasants increasingly took organised action usually on behalf of the land associations as a whole. The meetings of the peasants' land associations decided the question of whether such and such an estate was to be confiscated, took concerted action against the punitive detachments, resisted the anti-popular activities of the government commissars, and dealt with land questions on an organised basis for the benefit of the whole association.

With the build-up of social and political forces in the countryside the mass of the peasants moved to the left and this was bound to have an effect on the activities of the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies and the land committees. The position of these bodies was extremely complex. On the one hand, as representative bodies, they had to carry out all the government's instructions and act in accordance with its general political programme; on the

other hand, they were incapable of resisting the tremendous pressure of the peasant masses, who were now acting more decisively and were better organised.

The contradictions between the central government and the local government bodies were mounting daily and by July 1917 had reached their peak. No wonder that in many cases not only the volost and uyezd land committees, but even the gubernia committees passed decisions that overthrew government directives. For example, the Kiev Gubernia Land Committee demanded that Keren'sky's government should immediately, without waiting for the Constituent Assembly to solve the land question, pass a law transferring all land of agricultural importance, as well as waters and woodland of economic importance, to the control and disposal of the land committees.

Other gubernia committees passed similar decisions.

By July 1917 the land committees had virtually got out of the control of the government agencies and many had merged with the peasants' associations and were carrying out the decisions passed by peasant meetings.

The government and the corresponding ministries (justice, interior, etc.) began to receive hundreds and even thousands of telegrams about the expropriatory actions of the land committees, from all parts of the country.

The activities of the land committees and Soviets of Peasants' Deputies were strongly influenced by Lenin's speech on the agrarian question at the First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies. Numerous reports from the provinces indicated that the local government bodies, which had maintained a moderate line before the congress, had now suddenly changed their tactics.

Bolshevik influence over the mass of the peasants was mounting everywhere. The Provisional Government and the Menshevik-Socialist-Revolutionary Central Soviet of Peasants' Deputies began to receive from all parts of the country alarming news to the effect that the land committees and associations and even the people's militia were acting in accordance with the slogans and programme demands of the Bolsheviks. For example, the Public Prosecutor of the Kursk District Court reported that the peasants were acting in organised associations and that "these seizures are taking place mainly under the influence of the activities of the land committees led by the Bolsheviks". For the same reasons the militia also ignored the control of the government commissars. "I have practically no information from the uyezd militia chiefs," states the same report, "because the rural militia, formed on electoral princi-

ples, is acting hand in glove with the politically uninformed mass of the peasantry.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite the will of the bourgeoisie and the leaders of the conciliatory parties the objective course of events was guiding the social forces of the countryside created during the revolution towards the victorious agrarian revolution that was ultimately to bring about the complete emancipation of the working peasantry.

## 2. GROWTH OF THE MASS AGRARIAN MOVEMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND DEVELOPMENT OF TWO TRENDS IN THE PEASANT STRUGGLE

The specific historical feature of the second bourgeois-democratic revolution was that the peasants played their part in overthrowing the monarchy through the army rank and file, who were themselves mostly peasants. It took some time for the reverberations of the revolution to reach the villages and the agrarian movement began there only in the spring and summer of 1917.

Let us consider the evolution of the movement in the period from February to July 1917. After the February Revolution there were scarcely any peasant actions, with the exception of individual seizures of privately-owned land. The peasants were convinced that they would now receive land “by lawful means” from their “protectors”—the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who had become government parties. In the early days the land committees and Soviets of Peasants’ Deputies made no claims on landlord and bourgeois property in land because they were expecting directives that would allow them to solve the agrarian question in the spirit of the Socialist-Revolutionary programme of land socialisation.

Lulled by these hopes, the mass of the peasants were convinced of the need for all land to be fairly distributed among those who worked it, who turned the land into a source of life for everybody. The peasants expressed readiness not only to allow the landlords to keep their houses and other estate buildings, but even to assign to them from their former estates, if they so desired, enough land for them to work with the members of their own families.

Like the other exploiters, however, the landlords ignored the generous intentions of the working peasants and subsequent events

<sup>1</sup> CSHA USSR, f. 1405, op. 389, d. Ia, 1. 3, 26.

destroyed the peasants' illusions, convincing them of the need to organise for a showdown with the landlords and bourgeoisie. Soon this struggle unfolded on an unprecedented scale.

In the second half of April a great change occurred in the rural situation. Reports poured in indicating that the countryside had begun to appreciate and accept the ideas and programmes evolved and approved in the urban centres. This soon had its effect.

After the spring work on the farms the agrarian movement became political as well as organisational and began to move like an avalanche. Nothing could stop it. From month to month the number of peasants' uprisings multiplied—11 in March, 163 in April, 512 in May, 855 in June, and in July, despite a brutal terror campaign, 769 uprisings were recorded.

The agrarian movement began to interact with the revolutionary struggle of the working class. This helped to build a united class front oriented against all internal counter-revolutionary forces. This new feature of the agrarian movement raised it to a higher level of organisation and unity. The movement now had three main characteristic features.

[First] as the agrarian movement spread it began to acquire a definite political character. The peasant masses started openly boycotting the laws and instructions issued by the Provisional Government. They refused to join the army or pay taxes, drove out government officials and elected the most revolutionary deputies to the local organs of self-government. It is significant that as the situation became clearer the peasant masses not only showed their hostility to the Provisional Government but began to lose their faith in the Duma and the Constituent Assembly and demanded a solution of the land question before the latter was convened.

The summary report of the Delegates' Auditing Department of the All-Russia Central Soviet of Peasants' Deputies stated that after the revolution the peasantry had put its hopes in the State Duma and the Provisional Government, regarding them as bodies representing the people. "There had been a general pilgrimage from the provinces to the Duma and requests were sent in from all parts of the country for informed spokesmen to be sent from the State Duma." But this initial urge soon weakened and the peasantry realised that this was not the kind of government it had hoped for. It came to regard it as a "vague and indefinite force". This assessment was also applied to the Constituent Assembly. "In most cases," the report stated, "the impression of the peasants'



attitude to this element of Russian political life is discouraging."<sup>1</sup>

The peasants swung sharply towards the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, in which they now placed their trust and support. The prestige of the local Soviets soared after many of them began to support the peasants' demands. This in its turn tended to strengthen the mass agrarian movement.

*Second*, the agrarian movement was steadily gaining ground. Having started with scattered spontaneous rebellions, it was gradually turning into an organised mass movement. The number of individual or group arbitrary attacks and seizures was steadily declining. In most places the confiscation of the estates and other privately owned land was carried out according to decisions passed by the land committees or land associations, and often approved by the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies. As a rule, the confiscated lands were placed at the disposal of the whole association with a view to their being distributed among peasants who had either no land at all or too little land. It was highly significant that in certain places the confiscated estates passed into the ownership of organised collectives to be publicly managed under the control of the organs of local self-government.

Similar processes were occurring in the sphere of renting agreements and the hire and payment of labour. In the majority of cases these questions were dealt with in an organised manner.

The organised nature of the agrarian movement is also indicated by the fact that in a number of localities it began to grow into an armed struggle against the punitive detachments and military units sent by the government to protect the landowners' estates. Outstanding in this respect were the peasant associations, which met and took decisions on the organisation of armed resistance. There is massive factual evidence to show that where the peasants acted on an organised basis, as associations, they always won decisive victories against the punitive expeditions. For example, the peasants of Kopylovo in the Kiev Uyezd decided to confiscate an estate belonging to the landlord Durasov and set about redistributing the land, meadows and woodland that had belonged to him. When the militia arrived to guard the estate, they and their commander were disarmed and arrested by 500 armed peasants.<sup>2</sup>

And *thirdly* the agrarian movement was acquiring a class orientation. At first, there had been two tendencies, which later developed into definite trends and formed two fronts of class struggle

<sup>1</sup> CSHA USSR, f. 1278, op. 109, d. 4, l. 243.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, f. 405, op. 351, d. 1a, l. 8.

against the big landlords, on the one hand, and against the kulaks and particularly the small individual farmers who had left the communes.

The peasants' anti-Stolypin movement was so strong that by July 1917 the small holdings were almost entirely liquidated in many parts of the country. At the three sessions of the Main Land Committee held in July and August many speakers pointed out that the peasants' communes were taking over the individual farmers all over the country.

In this period the main thrust of the peasant struggle was against the legacy of Stolypinism. This was due, first, to the Provisional Government's repeal of the Stolypin anti-commune legislation, second, to the negative attitude to individual land ownership taken by the Socialist-Revolutionary party, which had now become one of the ruling parties; and third, to the bitterness of the commune peasants towards the individual farmers, who had struck a damaging blow at communal use of land. It was not surprising therefore that this politically conservative class, on which Stolypin had relied, should prove to be the first target of the revolutionary arrows that the rebellious peasants let loose.

Despite the extreme hostility towards the individual farmers, however, the landlords were still the main class enemy. As the organised peasant movement developed there was an increasing urge to destroy this hated class. Thus, from the class standpoint also the agrarian movement became quite clearly oriented by July 1917. On the one hand, it was anti-landlord, and on the other, anti-bourgeois. These two aspects of the class struggle complemented each other and gave the agrarian movement even greater scope, making its victory inevitable.

The scale of the agrarian movement not only dismayed the bourgeois and landlord classes, It also alarmed the leaders of the conciliatory parties, who hastened to disassociate themselves from this movement that looked like proving dangerous for them. On 3 July 1917 the Minister of the Interior placed before the coalition Provisional Government a draft decision proposing immediate measures to terminate the activities of the Soviets and committees inasmuch as they had usurped power, were taking action in the name of the people, breaking existing laws and repealing government instructions.

The draft was immediately passed by the government as a law prohibiting any encroachments on the big estates. Categorical bans were also placed on arbitrary pasturing of livestock on other people's land, reduction of land rent without the owners' agreement,

and restrictions and regulations concerning the hiring of labour were lifted. The smallest encroachment on private property was declared to be a grave crime against the state. All decisions passed by the land committees, land associations and Soviets of Peasants' Deputies involving confiscation of property in land were declared null and void. The Ministry of Justice was instructed to take immediate and severe action against individuals and organisations who had passed such decisions. In short, the situation that had existed before the revolution was to be restored in every respect.

The authorities launched mass punitive action against the rural areas. The volost land committees were the first to be repressed. In most cases they were disbanded and their members arrested and put on trial. Mass arrests followed among the peasant activists, the men who had returned from the front and members of the Bolshevik Party. The most progressive, revolutionary elements were driven out of the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies. The militia was purged.

Cossack punitive detachments were now given a free hand in the rural areas. The landlords and their estate managers returned to their domains. Requisitioning detachments descended on the peasants, taking their last food supplies for the war front. This rampage took place with the full knowledge and approval of the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary leaders, who were anxious to keep their ministerial posts at all costs. "Since May 6, members of the Party of S.R.s and Mensheviks have been *and still are* ministers and deputy ministers *together* with the 'despicable Cadets', *alongside* the 'despicable Cadets', *in alliance* with the 'despicable Cadets'!!"<sup>1</sup>

But the harsh methods of the punitive expeditions did not break the spirit of freedom among the peasant masses. The agrarian movement did not abate, it temporarily changed its forms of struggle. Now, as during the first revolution, the landed estates began to go up in flames and attacks and killings multiplied. The peasants in small groups made constant raids on storage buildings, rounded up cattle, destroyed sowing areas, carted the landowners' harvests from the fields, and cut down forests and orchards. *The peasants' struggle for restoration of the freedoms won by the revolution continued with renewed force and bitterness.*

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Landowners Have Hit It Off with the Cadets", *Collected Works*, Vol. 41, Moscow, 1969, p. 449.

### 3. THE BOLSHEVIKS' NEW TACTICS AGAINST THE SOCIALIST-REVOLUTIONARIES

The Socialist-Revolutionary Party had a powerful impact on the mass of the peasants, particularly in the years of the first Russian revolution. Although its programme propositions contained many mistakes, it had nevertheless put forward slogans that helped to awaken the revolutionary consciousness of the peasant masses and made them campaign for the abolition of the landed estates. This was a period when the main task of all Russia's progressive revolutionary forces was to overthrow the monarchy and steer the bourgeois-democratic revolution to victory. At this historical stage the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, which was on the Left flank of revolutionary democracy, undoubtedly made its contribution to the general democratic struggle, as Lenin repeatedly said.

But even then the Socialist-Revolutionary Party was not consistent in its agrarian policy. Petty-bourgeois to the core, it constantly vacillated and showed a tendency to compromise with the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. The weakest point in this party's programme and policy was its failure to recognise the great vanguard role of the proletariat. It also regarded the peasantry as a "solid" mass and paid no attention to its stratification and varying class interests.

While highly appreciating the revolutionary-democratic aspects of the Socialist-Revolutionaries' agrarian programme, Lenin and the Bolsheviks nevertheless openly and directly criticised its backward petty-bourgeois concepts, which were entirely adapted to the politically ignorant section of the peasantry and stimulated their private property instincts. In those days the Bolsheviks' struggle against the Socialist-Revolutionaries was mainly confined to theoretical exposure of their unrealisable petty-bourgeois illusions, such as "land socialisation", "egalitarian land use", "banning of hired labour", "prohibition of rent", and so on. Lenin constantly emphasised that the key factor in solving the land question was not to distribute the land but to defeat the landed nobility and the bourgeoisie so as to deprive these reactionary classes of the economic basis of their existence. How the confiscated land was to be distributed afterwards was a secondary question, although here too the revolutionaries should be careful to defend their class standpoint.

It might have seemed that the lessons of the first revolution and the decade of black reaction that had followed it would have had

their effect on the programme and tactics of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. But this had not happened. The Socialist-Revolutionaries' agrarian programme failed to change with the changing situation in the country. The peasant masses swung to the left, while the Socialist-Revolutionary tactics went further to the right. So naturally a different kind of struggle developed between the Bolsheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

The new situation raised the working peasants to an understanding of the need for fundamental agrarian changes. Their mood and aspirations had been clearly demonstrated in the first months of the revolution. But the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, which had entered the government coalition along with the Mensheviks, betrayed the peasants by collaborating in the suppression of the agrarian movement. Experience showed that "the S.R.s have betrayed the peasants to the landowners, that the S.R. Party has betrayed the peasantry, and that if it has not *also* 'hit it off' with the landowners, it has at any rate *surrendered* to them."<sup>1</sup>

It was historically inevitable that the working peasants should free themselves of Socialist-Revolutionary influence and take the side of the proletariat, because their hopes for a fundamental solution of the land question coincided with the interests of the working class and ran counter to the agrarian policy of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

[First] the Socialist-Revolutionary Party had designed its agrarian programme to preserve the bourgeois system and leave the bastions of big capital untouched. On the other hand, the demands of the working peasants expressed their desire for the revolutionary abolition not only of the landlord class but also the bourgeoisie.

[Second] the Socialist-Revolutionary Party envisaged confiscation of the landed estates by means of a peaceful arrangement with the landlords that did not rule out "fair" compensation of the former owners. The working peasants, on the other hand, demanded expropriation of the land by force, if necessary, and its conversion into the property of the whole nation without purchase, without compensation, and with a ban on its being bought and sold.

[Third] the Socialist-Revolutionaries told the peasants to wait patiently for a "solution" of the land question until the Constituent Assembly met. The peasants, on the other hand, were eager to settle this question before the assembly was held. All over Rus-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Landowners Have Hit It Off with the Cadets", *Collected Works*, Vol. 41, p. 449.

sia after the February Revolution they were seizing the landlords' estates and getting rid of the hated landlords.

*(Fourth)* the Socialist-Revolutionaries urged the peasants to obey the bourgeoisie whereas the peasants had turned away from the bourgeoisie and were marching under the banner of the working class which they saw as their only possible ally, as the only leader that was defending the interests of the people and campaigning resolutely for peace, freedom and land.

The onslaught of reaction negated the gains of the revolution. In the course of July many land committees were disbanded, and thousands of peasant activists were prosecuted and thrown into prison. In the Yelnya Uyezd of the Smolensk Gubernia alone, 70 committee members were put on trial. And all this, of course, went on with the knowledge of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. Their shameful conciliation, Lenin wrote, had resulted "in a 'vast' number of members of the land committees put on trial—trial under the old justice, by the old courts, by the tsarist-landowner courts; they have resulted in peasant revolts in Tambov and other gubernias!"<sup>1</sup>

How did the Socialist-Revolutionary leaders react to this outrage against the peasants? They confined themselves to hypocritical appeals and requests to the Ministry of Justice. The Socialist-Revolutionary Central Soviet of Peasants' Deputies issued a directive to the gubernia and uyezd Soviets to join in carrying out the government directives for protection of privately owned land and prevention of agrarian disorders. Now the Soviets and the government commissars were acting together and by their joint decisions replaced unco-operative committee chairmen and disbanded or re-elected the committees.

The campaign of reaction demolished Socialist-Revolutionary prestige among the peasant masses and raised the authority of the Bolsheviks to unprecedented heights. The Bolsheviks became the focal point of the truly revolutionary forces of Russia. The effect of the campaign of reaction was felt mainly among the mass of the soldiers, who came to the defence of the Bolshevik Party, the only force expressing the people's real interests. The mood of the mass of the men serving in the army may be judged from the following facts. At the beginning of August some of the soldiers from the war front wrote a letter to the Central Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies protesting on behalf of all frontline soldiers against

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Landowners Have Hit It Off with the Cadets", *Collected Works*, Vol. 41, p. 450.

the persecution of the Bolsheviks. They wrote: "Our Provisional Government is being very hard on the Bolsheviks. But we, soldiers at the front, cannot find them in any way to blame. We used to be against the Bolsheviks, but now after all the waiting for the Provisional Government to keep the promise it gave in the very first days to give freedom to the poor people which still has not been fulfilled, we are all gradually going over to the Bolsheviks."<sup>1</sup>

And here is another letter from a soldier to a fellow villager: "You may have heard, chum, about the Bolsheviks, about the Mensheviks, and about the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Well, I am now going to explain to you what the Bolsheviks are. The Bolsheviks, chum, are us, the most oppressed proletariat, and we, as you might say, are the poorest workers and peasants. And here is their programme: all power must be given to the workers', to the soldiers' and peasants' deputies; all the bourgeoisie must be put on military service; all the mills, factories, land and so on must be nationalised. And our men here, the whole lot of us, are following this programme."<sup>2</sup>

Such letters had become a common phenomenon. These feelings of the mass of the soldiers spread across Russia taking root and maturing among the peasantry. In these conditions the task of the Bolsheviks was to agitate vigorously in the countryside and steer the peasant masses away from Socialist-Revolutionary influence. Now it was not just a matter of theoretical exposure of the Socialist-Revolutionaries' petty-bourgeois illusions but of exposing them as betrayers of the interests of the working peasants. The dialectics of the revolution had converted this so-called peasant party into a force that was actually hostile to the peasants, while Lenin's workers' party had become the true voice of their fundamental interests.

"It follows that the emphasis in our propaganda and agitation against the Socialist-Revolutionaries must be shifted to the fact that they have betrayed the peasants," Lenin wrote. "They represent a minority of well-to-do farmers rather than the mass of the peasant poor. They are leading the peasants to an alliance with the capitalists, i.e., to subordination to them, rather than to an alliance with the workers. They have bartered the interests of the working and exploited people for ministerial posts and a bloc with the Mensheviks and Cadets."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CSHA USSR, f. 1300, op. 1, d. 99, l. 252.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "From a Publicist's Diary", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 279.

#### 4. THE PROLETARIAT WINS POLITICAL POWER – THE KEY TO THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IN RUSSIA

Lenin's agrarian programme was massively attractive to the proletariat and the poor peasants. It gave them new revolutionary prospects and helped to unite them and to free them of bourgeois influence. With a clear socialist goal before them the proletariat began to fight even more resolutely for the general democratic demands put forward by the Bolsheviks: Down with the war! Down with the capitalist ministers! Down with the coalition government! Immediate hand-over of land to the peasants! All power to the Soviets!

The decisions of the historic Sixth Party Congress, held in Petrograd from 26 July to 3 August 1917, played a crucial role in paving the way for the socialist revolution. The congress discussed and approved the Party's economic platform, which envisaged such revolutionary changes as confiscation of the big estates and nationalisation of all land, nationalisation of big industry and the banks, introduction of workers' control over production and distribution, and introduction of general labour duty. Basing itself on a correct assessment of the balance of class forces, the congress oriented the Party on armed uprising. It issued a manifesto to all working people in Russia appealing to them to be ready for a decisive clash with the bourgeoisie.

The proletariat's unselfish and heroic struggle rallied the bulk of the working peasantry and helped them to shake off their "patriotic" enthusiasm and the influence of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. Thus the Bolsheviks by influencing the Soviets and the peasant masses gradually, step by step, won them over to the side of the proletariat and prepared the ground for the socialist revolution. The result was a further growth of symptoms indicating that the peasants were moving to the left. This came out particularly after the July events, when the objective situation and balance of class forces brought the country to the great and decisive confrontation of the socialist revolution.

One of the favourable factors was that after the July events of 1917 there was a distinct move away from the Socialist-Revolutionaries on the part of the working peasants. This is borne out by a remarkable document of those days – the Peasant Mandate, which expressed the aspirations and hopes of millions of working people throughout the countryside. Even at the beginning of the second revolution the peasants throughout the country had begun drawing up their demands on the land question, which they in-



tended to present to the First All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Deputies. But as we have seen, the Socialist-Revolutionary leaders then succeeded in persuading the peasants' deputies to hold their demands until the Constituent Assembly met. Their success in persuading the peasants to postpone decisive action was only temporary, however, and they did not succeed in stopping the struggle for and which was assuming increasingly ominous dimensions.

It was at this turning point that the Peasant Mandate was conceived in the womb of the revolutionary peasant war. At the beginning of August 1917 the peasant mandates that were flooding in from the countryside to the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies were summarized in a document known as the Mode Mandate drawn up on the basis of 242 peasant mandates. On 19 August 1917 this summary document was published in the newspaper *Izvestia TsIK Vserossi skogo Soveta Krestvanskikh deputatov* (Bulletin of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies).

This pressure from the revolutionary peasants forced the Socialist-Revolutionaries to publish the Peasant Mandate although they had no intention of meeting its demands. This came out particularly after the victory of the October Revolution when the Socialist-Revolutionaries bluntly refused to carry out the Decree on Land on the grounds that the land question should be decided not by Soviet power but by the Constituent Assembly. The Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries had suffered defeat over the agrarian question since it had advocated the confiscation of the landed estates but refused to carry it into effect.

Lenin was the first to fully appreciate that the Peasant Mandate was an outstanding revolutionary document which the proletariat should use to lead the working peasantry. In his article

From a *Publicist's Diary* published in September 1917 he wrote that the summary of peasant mandates remains the only material of its kind which is an absolute must for every Party member.<sup>2</sup> This did not mean of course that the document was faultless in all respects. But Lenin valued it because it reflected the will and determination of the peasant masses in the struggle for fundamental agrarian changes.

What were these demands?

The first part of the summary Peasant Mandate dealt with the

V. I. Lenin. The Extraordinary All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Deputies. *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin. From a *Publicist's Diary*. *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 275.

general political situation. The Socialist-Revolutionaries urged the peasants to help build a bourgeois-democratic state, which would provide conditions for implementing the "socialist" principles of "egalitarian" land use and "workers'" management. The summary expressed the view that a genuine people's state should ultimately satisfy the peasants' aspirations and end their present position of having no rights on the basis of this demand. This, of course, was sheer adventurism and downright deception of the working peasantry. The Bolsheviks naturally would not come to any compromise about bourgeois democracy because it have then been quite impossible to satisfy the peasants' demands. These demands could be met only if political power were placed in the hands of the working class and the poor peasants.

[The second part] of the summary of mandates dealt with the question of the land. The peasants were asking mainly for the abolition, without compensation, of private property in land of all kinds, including peasant-owned land; transfer of highly efficient farms to the state or the communes; confiscation of all livestock and implements on the estates and their transfer to the state or the communes; a ban on hired labour and egalitarian distribution of land among the working peasants with periodical redistributions. As an interim measure, before the Constituent Assembly met, the peasants demanded immediate adoption of laws prohibiting the purchase and sale of land, repeal of the laws on allotment of commune land, and new legislation on protection of the forests, the fishing grounds and so on, and on the abolition of long-term and revision of short-term renting agreements, etc.

In giving his support to the peasants' land demands Lenin believed that the actual struggle for their realisation would inevitably draw the peasant masses away from so-called bourgeois democracy and bring them into the general revolutionary struggle of the proletariat. "You do not have to give these demands a lot of thought to see that it is absolutely impossible to realise them in alliance with the capitalists, without breaking completely with them, without waging the most determined and ruthless struggle against the capitalist class, without overthrowing its rule."<sup>1</sup>

And how could privately-owned land have been confiscated without confiscation of the vast capital held in the banks, where most of these lands were mortgaged? "Moreover, it is here a question of the most highly centralised capital of all, bank capital,

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "From a Publicist's Diary", *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 276.

which is connected through billions of threads with the nerve centres of the capitalist economy of a huge country and which can be defeated only by the no less centralised might of the urban proletariat.”<sup>1</sup>

The same applied to the second demand, regarding the confiscation of privately-owned livestock and implements and the transfer of well run farms to the state. The realisation of these measures would not only have benefited the working people, but would also have been a tremendous blow at private property in general. These demands testified to the growing political consciousness of the working peasants, who were seeking a solution to the agrarian question in the abolition of private property in land. “It means taking steps towards socialism, for the transfer of *livestock and implements* ‘to the exclusive use of the state or a commune’ implies large-scale, socialist agriculture or at least socialist control over integrated small farms, socialist regulation of their economy.”<sup>2</sup>

And finally, the demands for a ban on hired labour and the sale and purchase of land and abolition of rent were no less important. None of these crucial measures could be carried out in the framework of the bourgeois-landlord state. And this inevitably made the peasants understand the need for a radical change in the state and socio-economic system. The peasants, misled by Socialist-Revolutionary propaganda, did not know how to do this, how to put into practice their revolutionary agrarian demands. “A ban on wage-labour’ was formerly only an empty phrase bandied about by the petty-bourgeois intellectual. In the light of today, it means something different: the millions of peasant poor say in their 242 mandates that they want hired labour abolished but do not know how to do it. We know how. We know that this can be done only in alliance with the workers, under their leadership, against the capitalists, not through a compromise with them.”<sup>3</sup>

And Lenin went on to say: “Only the revolutionary proletariat, only the vanguard that unites it, the Bolshevik Party, can *actually* carry out the programme of the peasant poor which is put forward in the 242 mandates. For the revolutionary proletariat is *really* advancing to the abolition of wage-labour along the only correct path, through the overthrow of capital and not by prohibiting the hiring of labourers, not through a ‘ban’ on wage-labour. The revolutionary proletariat is really advancing to confiscation of land,

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 279–80.

implements, and agricultural technical establishments, to what the peasants want and what the Socialist-Revolutionaries *cannot* give them.”<sup>1</sup>

From our brief analysis of the Peasant Mandate it can be seen that its basic demands accurately reflected the needs of revolutionary development and facilitated the proletariat's struggle for power, for socialism. This was why the Communist Party supported its demands. At the same time the Party knew that the revolutionary democracy of the working peasants was restricted by the conditions of their socio-economic life. The peasant's small-commodity economy placed him in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, the peasant wanted to destroy large-scale private property in land because for decades it had been oppressing and ruining him. On the other hand, he was anxious to retain land ownership in the form of the small individual peasant holding. He therefore wanted unfence and reallocate the land on the principle of egalitarian redistribution.

This principle was unsound and petty-bourgeois because in the conditions of the small-commodity peasant economy it led to the development and consolidation of capitalism in agriculture and, consequently, to the oppression of the poor by the rich. But Lenin believed that all this could be set right by experience with the help of the proletariat and on condition that political power was in its hands. “The peasants want to keep their small farms, to set equal standards for all.... Fine. No sensible socialist will differ with the peasant poor over this. If the land is confiscated, that *means* the domination of the banks has been undermined, if the implements are confiscated, that *means* the domination of capital has been undermined – and in that case, *provided the proletariat rules centrally*, provided political power is taken over by the proletariat, the rest will come *by itself*, as a result of ‘force of example’, prompted by experience.”<sup>2</sup>

Lenin with his expert knowledge of peasant life was able to penetrate all its secrets and reveal the psychology of the small producer. He firmly rejected the arguments of the dogmatists who automatically brushed aside everything the peasants proposed merely on the grounds that the peasants themselves were petty-bourgeois. These dogmatists could not understand the new situation in which the great mass of working peasants had already risen to an

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “From a Publicist's Diary”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 281.

understanding of their class interests and were ready to march under the banner of the working class and carry the struggle to a victorious conclusion.

As for the petty-bourgeois nature of the peasants, this could only be overcome by having these two friendly classes fight side by side in the common struggle. Lenin explained that the faulty points in the peasant mandate were no obstacle to the achievement of the final aim. "The crux of the matter lies in political power passing into the hands of the proletariat. When this has taken place, everything that is essential, basic, fundamental in the programme set out in the 242 mandates *will become feasible*. Life will show what modifications it will undergo as it is carried out. This is an issue of secondary importance. We are not doctrinaires. Our theory is a guide to action, not a dogma."<sup>1</sup>

Developing his ideas in defence of the peasant demands Lenin highlighted the proposition on the need to build a close alliance between the proletariat and the working peasants. In the creativity of the masses, in the objective laws of socio-economic development Lenin found great revolutionary ideas and embodied them in the practical activities of the working class and its vanguard—the Communist Party. "We do not claim that Marx knew or Marxists know the road to socialism down to the last detail. It would be nonsense to claim anything of the kind. What we know is the direction of this road, and the class forces that follow it; the specific, practical details will come to light only through the *experience of the millions* when they take things into their own hands."<sup>2</sup>

*In his speeches and writings on the eve of the October Revolution Lenin with his boundless faith in creative Marxism gave an extremely vivid and complete theoretical substantiation of the new line on the agrarian question which the Bolshevik Party pursued in the period leading up to the socialist revolution and which it put into practice as soon as the revolution was victorious.*

## 5. THE GREAT AGRARIAN REVOLUTION APPROACHES

The July events were decisive in Russia's destiny. They showed that the revolution had reached a point beyond which there were only two possible outcomes. Either it would be finally crushed by

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

the combined forces of the counter-revolution or it would be crowned by the victory of the working class and the working peasantry.

The situation in the country after the shooting down of a peaceful demonstration in July 1917 was extremely tense. At one time it seemed that the counter-revolution had gained the upper hand and that its victory was now a foregone conclusion. The Bolshevik Party, the only patriotic force of the revolutionary people, was again driven underground. All chances of victory for the revolutionary people seemed to have been lost. The power of the counter-revolutionary officers was being restored at the front. Death sentences were being passed on progressive, revolutionary-minded soldiers and officers. Whole military units were being declared Bolshevik and punished by court martial.

The counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie went so far as to demand the banning of revolutionary-democratic organisations and non-interference of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in the affairs of the Provisional Government. The bourgeoisie was now completely opposed to power-sharing. It claimed a monopoly position in ruling the state and would gladly have got rid not only of the Soviets but of the Provisional Government as well. It had treacherous plans for handing over all power to the monarchist generals and setting up a military dictatorship.

The work of organising Russia's mass revolutionary forces went ahead at even greater speed. The working-class movement was spreading and growing stronger. By the beginning of August the conciliators had been driven out of most of the trade unions. Peasant uprisings swept the country with mounting fury. Attempts by the authorities to suppress them by military force achieved no results. Not a day passed without units or even the whole garrison mutinying in some town or other and expelling or killing the reactionary officers. The Bolsheviks' slogans were taken up by millions of workers, peasants and soldiers.

Two trends emerged in the revolution after the July events. On the one hand, there was a sharp swing to the right on the part of the conciliatory parties, who obediently carried out the will of the militarist bourgeoisie and drifted into the camp of the counter-revolution; on the other, the peasant masses began moving faster and faster to the left, uniting around the proletariat and maturing for a socialist revolution under the banner of Lenin's Bolshevik Party. The Kornilov conspiracy gave a tremendous boost to this revolutionary process. Not only did it compromise the conciliatory

parties; it also prompted the revolutionary masses to take Russia's destiny into their own reliable hands.

*The first word was spoken by Russia's real ruler—the revolutionary proletariat.* The working class united around the Bolshevik Party and by its decisive action wrecked the treacherous plans of the bourgeoisie and its attempts to set up a military dictatorship under Kornilov. The working class refused to allow the disbandment of its representative revolutionary-democratic organisations. In the space of a few weeks the workers purged the trade unions and the Soviets of conciliators and elected representatives of the Bolshevik party to these bodies.

The working class could no longer tolerate the disruption and ruin that the bourgeoisie and its agents had brought upon the country. Its first step was to set up control over production, particularly the war industry. The working class sent its best people into the army and set up a wide network of regimental and army committees to combat the counter-revolutionary officers. It backed up the peasants in their struggle with the landlords and the punitive detachments of the bourgeois and Menshevik-Socialist-Revolutionary government. And finally, the working class turned its attention to the great issue of war and peace and set about resolving it in favour of socialism.

Another factor that greatly increased the power of the working class was that by this time it enjoyed the full support of the army rank-and-file, who were led by the military revolutionary committees that then existed in all arms of the forces. The revolutionary troops of the Petrograd garrison and the heroic revolutionary sailors of the Baltic Fleet distinguished themselves. With their active support the working class overthrew the monarchy, smashed the putsch organised by the generals, and thwarted the plans of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. The revolutionary soldiers and sailors exerted a powerful influence in revolutionising the peasants and turning them towards the working class. A united front of the workers, soldiers and peasants was the force that was needed for the victory of the socialist revolution. The soldiers' active support of the working class meant that virtually all working peasants supported its revolutionary actions.

The loss of the trust of the peasant masses was a grave defeat for the conciliatory parties and a major victory for the Bolsheviks. After the February Revolution the peasants had expected the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries to give them the long-awaited peace, freedom and land, but these hopes were shattered by the July events. The punitive detachments, the requisitioning

expeditions, the unpaid labour that had to be performed on the landlords' estates and kulak farms, the widespread famine and a typhus epidemic were the only results that these so-called defenders of the toiling peasantry had brought to the devastated countryside.

The flames of popular anger mounted both at the front and in the rear. The press of those days cited large numbers of letters from soldiers at the front and peasants in the villages which provide a fair picture of the mood of the masses. Here is a letter from a Ukrainian soldier of a reserve regiment to his brother at the front: "I am sorry you're in such a critical situation, brother. Why should you be worse off than anyone else? None of the men here in the rear will go to the front, they all want peace. We must all unite and deal with the bourgeoisie. We have got to thin them out a bit and then we'll be all right. While you are at the front, the bourgeoisie are robbing your fathers and mothers and your wives and children. Here none of us will go into the front line, nor shall we give up our weapons until we get an explanation of what we have been shedding our blood for. That's what we have decided."<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, this letter was cited by no less a person than Milyukov, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the first Provisional Government, who in his memoirs was forced to acknowledge the universal indignation of the people and their readiness to rid Russia of her bourgeoisie, landlords and Menshevik-Socialist-Revolutionary rulers. The ruling classes had aroused the whole of Russia against them by their anti-national home and foreign policy. The July events and the Kornilov conspiracy pushed the peasant masses towards the working class, thus broadening and deepening the revolution. The temporary decline in the agrarian movement gave way to a new upswing more powerful than anything Russia had known before. Peasant uprisings multiplied. During the autumn months the revolutionary movement acquired such momentum that the punitive detachments and military units were powerless to halt it. This was a real revolutionary peasant war.

The new upsurge of the agrarian movement began in the second half of August 1917 and in the following months acquired unparalleled momentum. Its focal points were the gubernias of the Central Black Earth Region and from there the movement spread

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<sup>1</sup> P. Milyukov, *Rossiia na perelome* (Russia at the Turning Point), Prague, 1927, p. 121 (in Russian).



quickly across the country. The movement was now everywhere aimed at abolishing the big estates. The period of July reaction had left its mark on the peasantry. It had roused unprecedented bitterness against the landlords and finally dispelled the peasants' hopes of a peaceful solution of the land question. During September and October nearly all the gubernias in the European part of Russia were gripped by mass agrarian rioting and disorders. Thousands of cases were recorded but the full extent of the disorders was incalculable.

A fairly accurate picture of the scale of the agrarian movement in September and October 1917 can be gained from the map on page 326. The first map of this kind was made by B. Knipovich but it was by no means complete, as its author himself pointed out.<sup>1</sup> It was compiled on the basis only of information in the newspapers. By combining Knipovich's data with the records of the Ministries of Justice and the Interior we have tried to fill in the picture of the agrarian movement in Russia on the eve of the October Revolution.

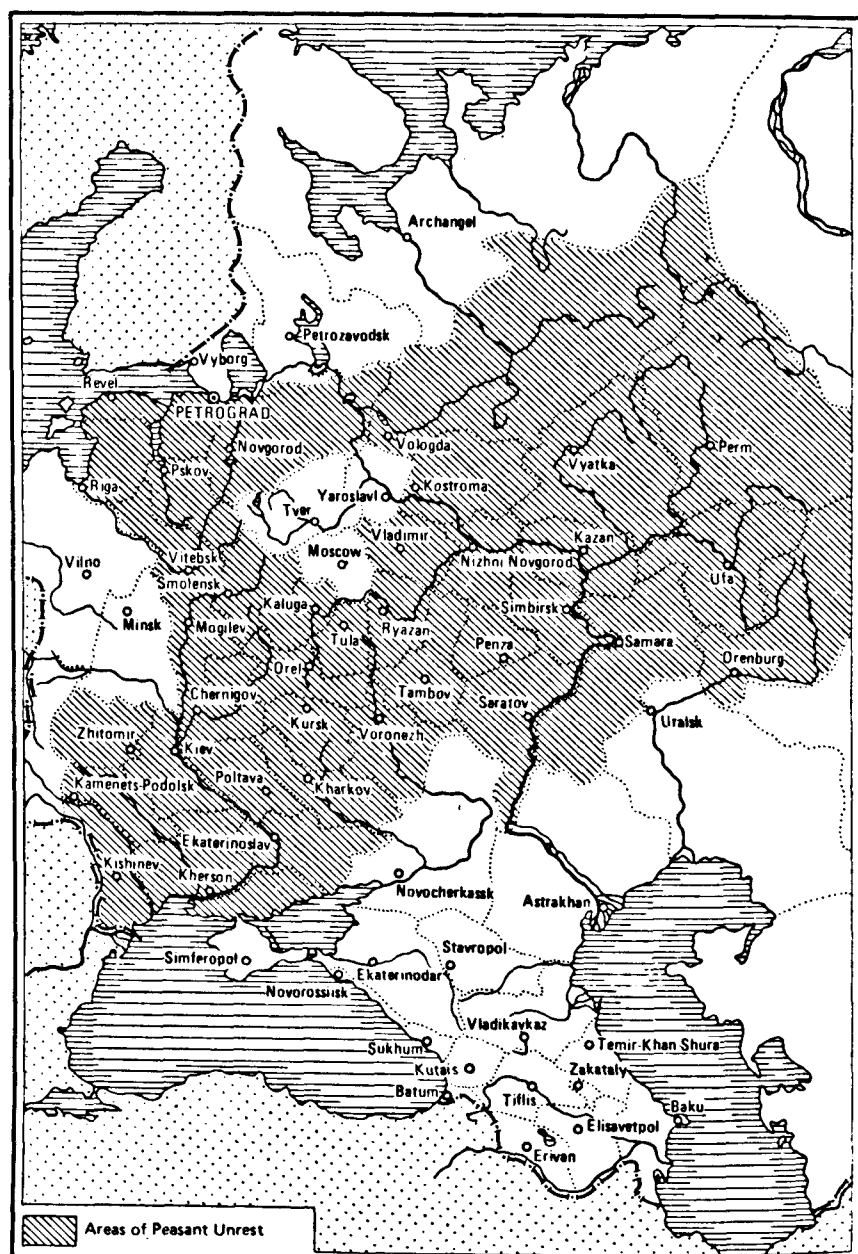
Matters had gone so far that the Ministry of Justice, whose task it was to deal with the agrarian disorders, could not even register all of them. The ministry's reports, however, present a vivid picture of peasant struggle which the government was now quite incapable of quelling. During the summer and autumn of 1917 44 gubernias in European Russia were swept by agrarian disorders. They assumed a very large scale in those which had been prone to peasant insurrection during the first revolution, such as Penza, Tambov, Kursk, Saratov, Kazan, Simbirsk, Samara, Oryol, and Voronezh.

Describing the situation at that time Lenin wrote in his article "The Crisis Has Matured": "In a peasant country, and under a revolutionary, republican government which enjoys the support of the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties that only yesterday dominated petty-bourgeois democracy, a peasant revolt is developing. Incredible as this is, it is a fact."<sup>2</sup> And further: "It is obvious that if in a peasant country, after seven months of a democratic republic, matters could come to a peasant revolt, it irrefutably proves that the revolution is suffering nation-wide collapse, that it is experiencing a crisis of unprecedented severity, and

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<sup>1</sup> See *O zemle* (On the Land), Issue 1, Collected Articles on the Past and Future of Land and Economic Construction, Moscow, 1921, pp. 18-43 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Crisis Has Matured", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 77.



Peasant unrest in European Russia, summer and autumn 1917

that the forces of counter-revolution have gone the *limit*.”<sup>1</sup>

What were the circumstances that drove the peasant masses to come out against the bourgeoisie and the conciliatory parties? The first factor was the militarist policy of the bourgeoisie and its agents. The daily expenditure on the war had by 1917 multiplied more than five times since 1914 and the main burden had to be borne by the working peasantry, who comprised the majority of Russia's population. The mass of the peasants were everywhere voicing a strong protest against the continuing rapacious war and demanding not only an end to the slaughter but the severe punishment of its instigators. The war was gobbling up the incomes of Russia's peasant farms. Suffice it to say that from the outbreak of war up to the October Revolution military spending exceeded 51,000 million rubles. The table below shows the enormous sums that were spent on the war and the burden that the mass of the people were forced to bear.

The second factor that roused the peasants was the incredible chaos, the collapse of economic life and the frightening spread of famine, which now enveloped even those who worked the land. By the autumn of 1917 famine was spreading through the towns and villages of many gubernias.

Period	War spending, millions of rubles	
	Total	Per day
1914, second half-year	1,655.4	10.0
1915, first —»—	3,144.2	17.4
second —»—	5,134.6	27.9
1916, first —»—	6,062.0	33.3
second —»—	8,510.8	46.3
1917, first —»—	10,051.3	55.5
second —»—	15,148.7	82.3
Totals . . . . .	51,470.7	40.8 (average)

The Kerensky government's Ministry of Food recorded a high incidence of starvation, epidemics, pogroms, profiteering and the beating up and killing of food requisitioners.

The working class was hit by a terrible food shortage. In the

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 79.

beginning of October 1917 deliveries of food to the large cities amounted to only 10 per cent of the very much curtailed quotas. The bread supply in Petrograd was only three quarters of a pound per week per head, while in other towns it was even less. The situation was equally critical at the front. According to official data, at the beginning of October 1917 the Northern Front had enough flour for 15 days and fodder for one day; the Western Front, flour for 11 days and fodder for  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days; the South-West Front, flour for six days and fodder for one day; and the Romanian Front, flour for 7 days and fodder for 3 days. These facts make up a severe indictment of the bourgeoisie and its Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary agents, who persisted in continuing the senseless war of mutual extermination.

*And finally, the third factor* that instigated the peasant rebellion was the land question, which had brought the atmosphere in the villages to flashpoint. And here, too, the blame lay mainly with the Socialist-Revolutionaries. The new Land Bill introduced by the new Socialist-Revolutionary Minister of Agriculture S. Maslov, published on the 18-19 of October in the central Socialist-Revolutionary Party organ *Dyelo Naroda* (Cause of the People) was a clear enough exposure of Socialist-Revolutionary intentions. "The S. R. Party has deceived the peasants: it has crawled away from its own land bill and has adopted the plan of the landowners and the Cadets for a 'fair assessment' and preservation of landed proprietorship."<sup>1</sup>

The three central points in this bill reversed everything the Socialist-Revolutionaries had once promised the peasants. In the first place, it transpired that only some of the estate land would come into the "temporary renting fund" that was to be set up; secondly, the inclusion of the estates was to be carried out by the land committees, which contained members of all classes; and thirdly, the rent paid for the estates was going mainly to the landowners. The bill exploded like a bomb shell among the peasantry of all strata. They had never seen or heard of such treachery. Within two months of the publication of the Peasant Mandate everything had been thrown into reverse. Lenin said that in the Socialist-Revolutionary bill "nothing at all remains of the peasant demand for confiscation".<sup>2</sup>

The people's patience was at an end. Now the workers and pea-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Socialist-Revolutionary Party Cheats the Peasants Once Again", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 232.

sants could actually see the trap the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries had led them into. *The crucial moment in the struggle between the Russia of the landlords and the bourgeoisie and the Russia of the workers and peasants was fast approaching. Revolutionary fury had risen to such a pitch that the people's victory was assured.* And this victory came thanks to the tireless organisational work of the Bolshevik Party, which welded the working class and the peasantry into a united and mighty force of victorious revolution.

Did the Bolsheviks on the eve of the October Socialist Revolution have the majority of the peasants on their side? History has long since given an unambiguous answer to this question. Even such a well-known reactionary as Milyukov testified in his memoirs that there was no other political force in Russia that had such influence as the Bolsheviks. Though burning with resentment against the revolutionary mass of the people, he did admit that they were placed in an impossible situation. In his memoirs he draws a picture of the mounting revolutionary fury that made "the victory of the Bolsheviks inevitable.... So power fell into the lap of the Bolsheviks like a ripe fruit".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P. Milyukov, op. cit., p. 121.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GREAT AGRARIAN REVOLUTION AND THE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN RUSSIA'S AGRARIAN SYSTEM

#### 1. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE FIRST AGRARIAN LAWS PASSED BY THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT

One of the greatest achievements of the October Socialist Revolution was that it *proclaimed and put into practice the most revolutionary and most progressive agrarian programme the world had ever seen*. The struggle that the toiling peasantry had waged through the centuries "for land and liberty" was crowned by their complete victory thanks to the fact that they broke with the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties and followed the working class and its Communist Party, thus supporting its struggle for power, for socialism.

Among the first enactments of the October Socialist Revolution was the historic Decree on Land, with which the Soviet Government began its deep-going revolutionary onslaught against the landed estates and bourgeois landownership. This document reflects, as in a mirror, the aspirations of the working peasants, who for centuries had been fighting for the land that had been watered with their own sweat and blood. The Peasant Mandate, which had been drawn up by the editors of the *Izvestia Vserossiiskogo Soveta krestyānskikh deputatov* (Bulletin of the All-Russia Soviet of Peasants' Deputies) and published on the eve of the October Revolution formed an integral part of this decree.

As we have said, the Peasant Mandate contained a number of erroneous propositions expounded in the spirit of the petty-bourgeois Socialist-Revolutionary programme of land socialisation. Nevertheless it was extremely progressive and, with the Soviets in power, ensured a sound alliance between the working class and the mass of working peasants. This was why the Communist Party and the Soviet Government responded to the wishes of the great majority of peasants and accepted the Peasant Mandate without

any amendments as the basis of the Decree on Land and made it law.

The most important proposition in the Peasant Mandate was the demand for the abolition of private ownership of the land and for a ban on the sale, purchase or mortgaging of land. "All land," the Mandate stated, "whether state, crown, monastery, church, factory, entailed, private, public, peasant, etc., shall be confiscated without compensation and become the property of the whole people, and pass into the use of all those who cultivate it."<sup>1</sup>

As for the egalitarian redistribution of the land among the peasants, as long as state power was in the hands of the proletariat this principle presented no obstacle to radical agrarian changes. The principle could be amended by life itself, by experience, by the struggle of the poorest strata of the rural population against the attempts of the well-to-do peasants to use this egalitarian principle as a means of taking over the land for themselves. Explaining the essential significance of the Decree on Land at the Second Congress of Soviets, Lenin said: "Voices are being raised here that the decree itself and the Mandate were drawn up by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. What of it? Does it matter who drew them up? As a democratic government, we cannot ignore the decision of the masses of the people, even though we may disagree with it. In the fire of experience, applying the decree in practice, and carrying it out locally, the peasants will themselves realise where the truth lies.... Experience is the best teacher and it will show who is right. Let the peasants solve this problem from one end and we shall solve it from the other. Experience will oblige us to draw together in the general stream of revolutionary creative work, in the elaboration of new state forms."<sup>2</sup>

When some time later Lenin was asked whether the Bolsheviks could participate in an "honest coalition" with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who were still trusted by many peasants, he replied in a special letter to the editors of *Pravda*: "They could; for, while they are irreconcilable in their fight against the counter-revolutionary elements (including the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries and the defencist elements), the Bolsheviks would be obliged to abstain from voting on questions which concern purely Socialist-Revolutionary points in the land programme...."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted according to V. I. Lenin, "Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, pp. 258-59.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 260-61.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Alliance Between the Workers and the Working and Exploited Peasants", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 334.

But if in the Constituent Assembly the peasants wanted to pass a law on egalitarian use of the land, and the bourgeoisie were against the peasants' demands, "under such circumstances ... the alliance between the workers and the working and exploited peasants would make it obligatory for the party of the proletariat to vote for the peasants and against the bourgeoisie. The Bolsheviks, in my opinion, would be entitled when the vote was being taken to make a declaration of dissent, to place on record their non-agreement, etc., but to abstain from voting under such circumstances would be to betray their allies in the fight for socialism because of a difference with them on a partial issue. The Bolsheviks would never betray the peasants in such a situation."<sup>1</sup>

From this it can be seen how flexibly and carefully Lenin approached the question of the attitude towards the peasantry. *The alliance between the workers and peasants was for him the first of all commandments and an essential condition without which there could be no complete victory of the revolution.* As for the petty-bourgeois illusions of the peasant masses and their hopes in egalitarianism, Lenin did not attach much importance to them because they were no obstacle to the development of the socialist revolution. *This all goes to show how skilfully he fought the Socialist-Revolutionaries with their own weapon, their agrarian programme, which ultimately enabled the Bolsheviks to win the peasant masses away from the Socialist-Revolutionaries and bring them over to the working class at the crucial moment of the revolution.*

By passing the Decree on Land and including in it the Peasant Mandate and by its consistent and patient explanation of what the decree was all about, the Communist Party clearly showed the working peasants that it was coming half way to meet them and supporting their main demands over the land question. "We reprinted the Decree on Land many times as a booklet and sent it out in large numbers free of charge not only to the gubernia and uyezd centres, but also to all the volosts of Russia," V. D. Bonch-Bruyevich recalled. "The Decree on Land really did become universally known, nation-wide, and there has probably never been any other law that was so widely published in Russia as the law on the land, one of the most fundamental laws of our new, socialist legislation, to which Vladimir Ilyich attached such vast importance and devoted so much strength and energy."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Alliance Between the Workers and the Working and Exploited Peasants", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> V. D. Bonch-Bruyevich, *Vospominaniya o Lenine* (Reminiscences of Lenin), Moscow, 1969, pp. 126-27 (in Russian).



In its turn the working peasantry, fully approving the Decree on Land, responded everywhere with a readiness to fight devotedly for Soviet power. The best evidence of this is the fact that the All-Russia Peasant Congress that met on 17 November 1917 unanimously approved the decrees on peace and land and expressed their firm confidence that the alliance between the workers, peasants and soldiers would consolidate the state power that they had won.

Lenin took a keen interest in the distribution of the Decree on Land among the soldiers and peasants. He advised the functionaries of the Council of People's Commissars that when they gave the demobilised men the Decree on Land they should explain its significance to each of them and not forget to say that if the landlords and kulaks were still occupying confiscated land they must be driven out and the land put at the disposal of the peasant committees.

On 19 February 1918 the Soviet government published the Law on the Socialisation of the Land, which had been drawn up at the Third Congress of Soviets in January 1918 with the participation of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries who after the Congress of Peasants' Deputies had become members of the Soviet Government. In making this law the Soviet Government once again emphasised that, although it was keeping firmly to Lenin's agrarian policy, it was at the same time making concessions to the peasants over the form of land use to be adopted. By passing the Decree on Land the Soviet Government proclaimed the abolition of landed proprietorship and the old land relations, and with the Law on the Socialisation of the Land it satisfied the peasants' demands for egalitarian land use on the basis of labour and subsistence standards and answered the questions of how the agrarian reform should be carried out in practice.<sup>1</sup>

The Communist Party boldly adopted a compromise agreement with the petty-bourgeois parties on the question of land because it was sure that with a workers' and peasants' government in power and the land nationalised the egalitarian principle of land use according to labour and subsistence standards would not hinder the deep-going agrarian changes that were afoot in the country. In

<sup>1</sup> In this context "labour standard" means that each person should receive as much land as he can work with his own labour and that of his family. The "subsistence standard" means that only enough land is given for the income from working it to keep the family in question. Experience showed the fallibility of these principles. Unsatisfactory from the theoretical point of view, they turned out to be quite unworkable in practice.

addition it took into consideration the mood of the peasant masses themselves, who even before this, in their well-known "mandates", had expressed the desire to redistribute all land on the basis of egalitarian sharing.

Thus the solution to the land question turned out to be highly complex and highly contradictory. All the petty-bourgeois parties greeted the legalising of land socialisation with enthusiasm because they saw it as the main lever for winning over the mass of the working peasants. But nothing came of these dreams. Experience showed that the egalitarian principle of land use caused a deep division of class interests among the peasants themselves. The poorer and middle peasants soon realised that this principle would tend to strengthen the rural bourgeoisie and enslave those who actually worked the land.

Foreseeing the inevitability of fundamental socialist changes in agriculture, the Bolsheviks made sure that the Law on Socialisation of the Land included their scientific agrarian propositions on the need to give all-out support for the development of social forms of economy in agriculture. So although the Socialist-Revolutionaries proposed to rely exclusively on individual farms, and kulak-type farms at that, the law stressed the need to defend the interests of the working peasantry and do everything possible to promote collective forms of economy. The section entitled "The Form of Land Use" makes the following point: "In order to hasten the advance of socialism the Russian Federative Soviet Republic shall do everything to promote (by cultural and material assistance) the working of the land in common, giving priority to the communist-labour, artel and co-operative farms over the individual farms."<sup>1</sup> Another section of the law stressed that the duties of the local and central agencies of Soviet power included, besides the fair distribution of land and the most productive use of national resources, "the development of collective farming in agriculture as being more efficient in the sense of economising labour and materials at the expense of the individual farms and for the purpose of moving on towards a socialist economy".<sup>2</sup>

The law demanded that land should be given in the first place to the peasants who had little or no land and local agricultural labourers. The whole work of redistribution was to be conducted

<sup>1</sup> *Ekonomicheskaya politika SSSR* (The Economic Policy of the USSR), Collected Documents, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1947, p. 86 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 78.

under the control of the agencies of Soviet power. Their duties included not only the correct redistribution of confiscated lands but also dealing with the problem of how the implements and buildings of the estates could best be used.

Soviet power thus struck a crushing blow at the pro-kulak policy of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, who had counted on redistributing the land through the peasant communes, without the participation and guiding influence of the Soviets. The Socialist-Revolutionaries had hoped that the kulaks and well-to-do peasants, who were entrenched in the land communes, would effect a land reform in their own interests and strengthen their positions in the countryside. But the Socialist-Revolutionary hopes of winning over the working peasants by means of egalitarian land use and clearing the road for the capitalist development of the countryside came to nothing. By conducting the agrarian reform in the interests of the working peasantry and to the detriment of the rural bourgeoisie the Communist Party saw to it that the poor peasants rallied around the working class and that the middle peasants also took the side of the Soviet government.

The principle of the egalitarian redistribution of the land had a dual significance. Under the bourgeois system it led to intensification of capitalism in the countryside, to the impoverishment of the working peasants and the loss of their land; this was the goal that the Socialist-Revolutionary programme of land socialisation expressed. Under the Soviet system, on the other hand, the principle of egalitarian land use was applied so as to benefit the rural population who had little or no land and served as a means of attracting the working peasants to the side of the working class and restricting the capitalist elements. And this was the direction that the Communist Party took in carrying out the land decrees of the Soviet Government.

The Decree on Land and the Law on the Socialisation of the Land revolutionised life in the countryside. As the basis for the solution of the agrarian question in Russia they won the allegiance of millions of peasants to the socialist revolution. "We were victorious in Russia not only because the undisputed majority of the working class was on our side (during the elections in 1917 the overwhelming majority of the workers were with us against the Mensheviks), but also because half the army, immediately after our seizure of power, and nine-tenths of the peasants, in the course of some weeks, came over to our side; we were victorious because we adopted the agrarian programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries instead of our own, and put it into effect. Our vic-

tory lay in the fact that we carried out the Socialist-Revolutionary programme; that is why this victory was so easy."<sup>1</sup>

But the Communist Party could not confine itself merely to proclaiming revolutionary laws on the land; it had to bring them home to the consciousness of the peasant masses and carry them out in the interests of the working people. This entailed enormous organisational and mass propaganda work among the peasants and recruiting them for active struggle against the landlords and the rural bourgeoisie. The rural poor needed effective help from the Soviet Government. In his speech at a meeting of the Bolsheviks' Central Committee on 14 November 1917 Lenin said: "We must rely on the people, we must send propagandists into the countryside,"<sup>2</sup> For this purpose the Council of People's Commissars passed its decision of 15 November 1917 "On Emissaries Concerning Questions of the Land". These emissaries were at once sent out to all gubernias to explain the land decrees and take the necessary measures to help the working peasants go about the agrarian reform in the right way. "The great agrarian revolution—proclamation in October of the abolition of private ownership of land, proclamation of the socialisation of the land—would have inevitably remained a paper revolution if the urban workers had not stirred into action the rural proletariat, the poor peasants, the working peasants, who constitute the vast majority."<sup>3</sup>

On Central Committee instructions large numbers of emissaries and propagandists were sent out to the provinces to explain the Decree on Land.

Thanks to the Communist Party's energetic political and organisational work, the laws on the land quickly reached the lower strata of the peasants. The countryside went into action. The uyezds congresses of Soviets were followed by volost congresses and finally by big peasant meetings in large and small villages.

✓ The great break-up of the old land relations, the destruction of landed proprietorship began. This was a real revolutionary redistribution. The process was most effective in the gubernias where the poor peasants were well organised, where Bolshevik influence was strongest. It should not be regarded merely as a technical pro-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Third Congress of the Communist International", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, Moscow, 1965, pp. 474-75.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speeches at a Meeting of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.), November 1 (14), 1917", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 276.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes, December 11, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, Moscow, 1965, p. 340.

cess, confined to the dividing up of land among peasants with little or no land. The land relationships had to be built on a completely new basis and this required the revolutionary destruction of all vestiges of feudalism, stimulation of the creative initiative of the poor peasants and their organisation as a progressive political force in the countryside.

*The great transformative power of the first agrarian laws passed by the Soviet Government lay in the fact that they abolished landed proprietorship, brought about a revolution in land use throughout Russia, unleashed and intensified the political and economic initiative of the working strata of the peasantry in the struggle for Soviet power, and opened the road for a new socialist development of the countryside.*

The Soviet Government's agrarian reform differed fundamentally from all the agrarian reforms that had taken place in the history of bourgeois and bourgeois-democratic revolutions. From the bourgeoisie the peasants had never, in any country, received land free of charge and without compensation. All the bourgeois agrarian reforms had pursued aims of exploitation because they envisaged and stipulated compensation of the landlords that the poverty-stricken working peasants could not afford, with the result that the expropriated land fell into the hands of other exploiters. In no country had the bourgeoisie after gaining power dared to abolish the feudal dependence of the peasants on the landlords. On the contrary, it had always and everywhere sided with feudalism, with the nobility, securing its interests at the expense of the peasantry.

Admittedly, whenever the bourgeoisie had to fight feudalism, it resorted to the help of the peasants and promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, but always and everywhere, once victory had been won, it betrayed them and turned away from them. The bourgeois revolutions in Western Europe were a striking example of this. In the most radical of them all—the French bourgeois revolution of 1789-94—the peasants, who have been the mainstay of the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the feudal lords, did not receive land free of charge and were obliged to buy it at very high prices. As a “favour” the French bourgeoisie auctioned the land to its “ally”, the peasantry. But this was not all. After the restoration of the monarchy the nobility and the priests who returned from emigration, with the consent of the bourgeoisie, exacted from the peasants an additional 1,000 million gold francs for “their” land, which had already been sold once. This was the fraudulent outcome for the peasants of the vaunted bourgeois agrarian reform.

Like the Right Social-Democratic leaders in Europe the Russian Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries vociferously advocated compensation of the landlords for their land. Only the great party of Lenin, having steered the October Socialist Revolution to victory and having brought the working class to power, immediately made the confiscated estates of the big landowners available for the use of the peasantry free of charge without any payment or compensation. The workers' and peasants' state not only put vast areas of land into the hands of the working peasantry, it also swept away the old land relationships and with them all vestiges of feudal dependence. It destroyed all unfair agreements, cancelled the land debts that the peasants had accumulated over decades, freed the poor peasants from tax impositions, and did away with money-lenders and mutual responsibility.

The proletarian revolution dealt with all these pressing questions of agrarian policy in its stride. The relative ease and rapidity with which they were solved were due to the fact that the "peasant war" that swept the country on the eve of the October Revolution coincided with the socialist revolution. *The working class struggle for power was strengthened by the massive peasant movement for the land, for stopping the war, and for the overthrow of the imperialist bourgeoisie. In its turn, this "lucky" confluence of the two great revolutionary streams gave the October Revolution unprecedented scope and drive thus accelerating and facilitating its victory.*

## 2. LAND NATIONALISATION – THE DECISIVE CONDITION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE ALONG THE NEW, SOCIALIST PATH

The most remarkable thing about the October Revolution was that the working peasants received their political and economic emancipation and great material benefits from the working class, which, having won political power, honourably fulfilled its great mission of liberation. *The October Revolution set the stage for an effective and practical solution of the agrarian problem in Russia.*

For a start the land part of this problem was solved quickly and successfully. As a result, the peasants immediately felt that the land was in their hands. And another important part of the agrarian problem, the right of landownership, was also successfully solved. The peasants were quite satisfied with the fact that the proletarian state, which stood guard over their interests, had

become the monopoly owner of the land. And finally a common language was quickly found on the subject of the forms of land use. The peasants realised that the Soviet Government had no intention of restricting them on this point. There remained only one unsolved part of the agrarian problem and in the context of a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat it was the main question. What direction was agriculture to take—capitalist or socialist? But to decide this the peasant needed time—time to find out by experience which path was better.

*In solving all these aspects of the agrarian problem the Party displayed considerable flexibility, foresight and restraint. It boldly accepted a compromise with the middle strata of the peasantry with the petty-bourgeois parties and openly supported peasant demands although it did not agree with all of them. This was why other agrarian proposals were reflected in the Decree on Land.*

In this decree we find the most varied elements of agrarian policy: (a) *nationalisation* of the land—land is being made the property of the workers' and peasants' state; (b) *municipalisation* of the land—putting it at the disposal of the local (gubernia and uyezds) Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies; (c) *division* of the estates for the use of the working peasants; and (d) *socialisation* of the land—its equalitarian distribution according to labour and subsistence standards.

In his article *On Compromises* Lenin wrote: "The task of a truly revolutionary party is not to declare that it is impossible to renounce a compromise but to be able *through all compromises* when they are unavoidable to remain true to its principles, to its class, to its revolutionary purpose, to its task of paving the way for revolution and educating the masses of the people for victory in the revolution."

In his speeches and articles of those days *Lenin never tired of explaining that with state power in the hands of the proletariat there was nothing to fear in the programme of socialisation, the programme of municipalisation or the programme of distribution because the transitional period from capitalism to socialism did not renounce but on the contrary presupposed a number of transitional measures that would inevitably strengthen the new system and lead towards the victory of socialism.* Moreover Lenin emphasised that for the Western countries with the developed capitalist agriculture these transitional measures would not be needed when the proletariat came to power. In these countries capitalism had a ready

created the preconditions for the transition to socialism in agriculture as well as industry. But in Russia, he pointed out, the land relationships were so confused that a direct switch to socialism without transitional measures was impossible.

The transitional measures leading to the victory of the new social system were as follows: confiscation of the land of the big proprietors and its transfer to the poor and middle peasants; proletarian nationalisation of all land; a ban on the sale and purchase of land; egalitarian distribution of the land, and so on. All these measures helped to strengthen the alliance of the working class and the mass of working peasants and facilitated the socialist reorganisation of agriculture. Pointing out the inevitability of such measures in the sphere of land use, Lenin said: "...The workers would be obliged to agree to the transitional measures proposed by the small working and exploited peasants, provided such measures were not detrimental to the cause of socialism.... For the proletariat to impose such transitional measures would be absurd; it is obliged, in the interests of the victory of socialism, to yield to the small working and exploited peasants in the choice of these transitional measures, for they could do no harm to the cause of socialism."<sup>1</sup>

The most important of these transitional measures was the proletarian nationalisation of the land and other means of production. This was the most vivid reflection of the profound revolutionary essence of the agrarian reform. The nationalisation of the land laid reliable foundations for the development of agriculture along the new, socialist path. At the April Party Conference in 1917 Lenin had indicated that the first measure the Soviets would have to take would be nationalisation of the land because the system of landownership in Russia was so confused that there was only one solution – to unfence all land and turn it into state property. Land nationalisation as a revolutionary measure implemented by the proletarian dictatorship ensured that the bourgeois democratic revolution was carried through and gave "the proletarian state the maximum opportunity of passing to socialism in agriculture".<sup>2</sup>

In carrying out Lenin's agrarian policy the Communist Party based itself on the interests of the working peasants. Besides expressing the desire to abolish landed proprietorship, the peasants

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Alliance Between the Workers and the Working and Exploited Peasants", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 315.



also demanded nationalisation of agriculture. In point of fact however already the 1905 Revolution revealed that the vast majority of the peasants in Russia members of village communes as well as homestead peasants were in favour of nationalisation of agriculture. The 1917 Revolution confirmed this and after the assumption of power by the proletariat this was done.

Besides nationalising the land the Party also nationalised other means of agricultural production. On 8 December 1917 a decision of the Council of People's Commissars was issued on "Monopoly State Disposal of Agricultural Machines and Implements". This decree was further developed by a draft on "Requesting of Agricultural Machines and Implements" which was submitted to the Council of People's Commissars on 7 December 1917. Lenin introduced an amendment to the draft pointing out that the state retains the ownership of the machines and the uyezds Soviets of Peasants' Deputies as well as the voyskovy land committees must take charge of these machines maintaining strict protection of the public property"<sup>2</sup>

Later on 27 April 1918 the Council of People's Commissars published a decree on "Supply of Agriculture with Instruments of Production and Machinery" which again confirmed that all machines and implements manufactured in Russia and also those imported from abroad were to be placed at the monopoly disposal of the state. During the discussion of this decree Lenin also introduced his remarks: "The basic principle of distributing agricultural machines etc. must be on the one hand and above all to ensure the interests of agricultural production the cultivation of agriculture and raising of agricultural productivity and on the other the supply of agricultural machines etc. primarily above all to the working and poorest part of the rural population"<sup>3</sup>

The Communist Party thus concentrated in the hands of the proletarian state not only the whole of Russia's land resources but also the implements and means of agricultural production and put them to use to help the poor peasants develop agriculture and organise it on a new basis.

What transformative role did nationalisation of the land play in the conditions of the Soviet state? Above all it was incompatible with the right of private landownership. The socialist revolution made the workers and peasants state the sole owner of the land and the state was at the same time the monopoly owner of other

b d p 33

<sup>2</sup> Lenin *Works* XXI p 43

<sup>3</sup> b d p 46

means of production. By nationalising the banks, transport, the big enterprises and mineral resources, the workers' and peasants' state turned them into national property and thus destroyed the basis for exploitation of the working people.

The Soviet state made nationalised land available for the use of the working peasantry free of charge. But in doing so it prohibited the sale and purchase of land and restricted the renting of land and thus protected the working peasantry from kulak bondage and deprived the kulaks of any chance of taking over the best land and turning the working peasants into their hired labour force. Consequently, *land nationalisation under Soviet power was a powerful means of restricting the growth of the kulak class, protecting the middle peasants from bankruptcy, and helping the poor peasants.*

Not only does land nationalisation offer the opportunity of correct and rational land use. It also helps to bring the peasantry over to the side of the proletariat and strengthen the alliance between the working class and the mass of working peasants. Having nationalised the land the Soviet state was able to build large numbers of big socialist-type farms, bring under cultivation vast areas of new land, carry out correct land-use surveying, and improve agricultural practices.

Land nationalisation was vitally important for the working class in guiding the poor and middle peasant masses towards the socialist reorganisation of agriculture. Later this measure was to be the decisive factor in overall collectivisation and the liquidation of the kulaks as a class. *It liberated the peasant from his servile attachment to his own bit of land and thus eased the transition from the small peasant economy to the large-scale collective farming.* *Transformation of private landownership into national ownership is an indispensable law of the socialist revolution.* At the same time, as the classics of Marxism-Leninism pointed out, nationalisation of all land immediately after the socialist revolution is not obligatory for every country. This reservation had to be made because the majority of farmers in the developed capitalist countries are private landowners, and in Western Europe they form the majority of the rural population.

The small and medium landowners in these countries will naturally be unable to immediately accept the idea of nationalisation and give up the land which has cost them so much effort and sacrifice to obtain and to which they are strongly attached. Lenin therefore warned against any haste in carrying out this measure in countries where the communal form of land use had long since died out and been replaced by peasant ownership of the land. In

his draft of the agrarian theses for the Second Congress of the Comintern Lenin wrote: "In most capitalist countries, however, the proletarian state should not at once completely abolish private property; at all events, it guarantees both the small and the middle peasantry not only the preservation of their plots of land but also their enlargement to cover the total area they usually rented (the abolition of rent)."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin's wise advice helped the fraternal Communist Parties to achieve correct solutions to their agrarian problems and adopt Marxist agrarian programmes which played an invaluable role in rallying the working mass of peasants around the revolutionary proletariat. Things turned out as Lenin had foreseen. In the subsequent socialist revolutions that took place in Europe and Asia land nationalisation was not given the priority it had been given in Russia. At the same time agrarian reforms were carried out which, while coinciding in the main with Lenin's agrarian policy, made a worthy contribution to the further creative elaboration of the agrarian and peasant question on a Marxist-Leninist basis.

### 3. ABOLITION OF THE BIG ESTATES AND FORMATION OF A SMALL-SCALE PEASANT ECONOMY IN THE RURAL AREAS

The most striking feature of the great agrarian revolution in the countryside was the revolutionary abolition of the big landed proprietorship—the mainstay of political reaction and the chief cause of Russia's economic backwardness. But having begun with the winding up of the big estates the agrarian revolution could not of course stop half way. It inevitably had to deal with the whole system of the old agrarian relations and change the whole direction of their development. So, besides the abolition of the estates more than two-thirds of the large kulak farms, accounting for 50 million dessiatines of land, were expropriated and the ownership of land allotted to individual peasants under the Stolypin reform was almost totally swept away.

Thus the revolution primarily affected *large-scale private ownership of the land*, which was virtually done away with. This was as much a matter of economic necessity as of satisfying the revolutionary-democratic demands of the working peasants. As we have

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, Moscow, 1974, p. 157.

already stressed, landownership in Russia was so confused, fragmentary and disorganised that there was only one way of getting rid of all vestiges of the Middle Ages: *all land, whether privately owned or in the possession of peasant communes, had to be disenclosed and then redistributed on a new social basis.*

The revolution was to bring about a radical change in Russia's whole agrarian system. "...The peasants came to this conclusion because all landownership in Russia, both peasants' and landowners', communal and homestead, is permeated with old, semi-feudal relationships.... The Stolypin Reform has since then confused the land question still more."<sup>1</sup> Lenin's analysis revealed the contradictions in the situation: "The peasant is guided by the instinct of the property owner, who is hindered by the endless fragmentation of the present forms of medieval landownership and by the impossibility of organising the cultivation of the soil in a manner that fully corresponds to 'property owning' requirements if all this motley medieval system of landownership continues."<sup>2</sup>

This was why the Communist Party unhesitatingly supported the peasants' demands that all land be brought together in a single mass and then be redistributed. And this was done. Nearly all land resources, a total of 237.8 million dessiatines, were brought together in a general land fund, which included 59.5 million dessiatines of privately owned land, 39.5 million of state and crown lands and 138.8 million dessiatines of allotted lands. *This was a real basic redistribution, the kind of redistribution that the working peasants had long dreamed of but that could be carried out only under the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat and its vanguard, the Communist Party.*

So *[the first result]* of the revolution was the abolition of large privately owned farms and the whole medieval system of landownership. This was a great gain for the working peasants. It gave them the chance of organising the new farming on free "unfenced" land. To provide a clearer picture of the fundamental changes that had occurred in Russian landownership we can cite the following figures on the distribution of land resources in 32 gubernias of Central Russia<sup>3</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 283-84.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> See B. N. Knipovich, *Ocherk deyatelnosti Narodnogo Komissariata Zemledeliya za tri goda (1917-1920)* (An Essay on the Activities of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture During Three Years, 1917-20), Moscow, 1920, pp. 6, 7 (in Russian).

Before the 1905 revolution		After the 1917 revolution	
Land category	percentage of land	Land category	percentage of land
Working fund — peasants' lands	76.3	Peasants' land	96.8
		Collectively farmed land	0.5
Other privately owned and state lands	23.7	Land assigned to state farms, industrial enterprises, etc.	2.7
Totals . . . . .	100.0		100.0

These data show that landownership in Russia had undergone enormous changes. Nearly all land was now concentrated in the hands of the working peasants and it should be remembered that the gubernias referred to were, according to our source, among those where the fund of landlords' lands had been smallest of all before 1905. In the Ukraine, for instance, the peasants had previously owned only 55.4 per cent of the land.

It should be added that the lands owned by landlord's lands were generally better and were so situated that the peasant strips had virtually no independent significance. So the abolition of the big estates undoubtedly improved peasant farming from the qualitative angle as well. (But the working peasants' tremendous gains were expressed not only in the acquisition of land (they now had 97 per cent of the country's land resources). From the big estate owners they also received 90 per cent of the livestock (10 per cent went to the state and collective farms) and 350 million gold rubles' worth of agricultural implements. Lenin had good grounds for saying that "in this peasant country it was the peasantry as a whole who were the first to gain, who gained most, and gained immediately from the dictatorship of the proletariat".<sup>1</sup>)

[The second result] of the revolution was the new agrarian system that took shape in the very first year of Soviet power and that was mainly small-scale peasant farming. Russia had changed from being a country of big estates into a country of small peasant

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, Moscow, 1965, p. 112.

farms. Let us compare the figures showing the size of farms before the revolution and under Soviet rule. For example, at the time of the first Russian revolution there were in Russia 28,000 large landlords holding an average of 2,227 dessiatines each. In addition, 700 landowners owned an average of 30,000 dessiatines each. Among the peasant holdings there was a thick layer of large holdings. Out of the 137 million dessiatines of allotted land nearly one half, i. e. 64 million dessiatines, belonged to 2.1 million rich peasants (out of a total of 12.25 million peasant farms), which meant an average of 30.5 dessiatines per farm. From a study of the statistics Lenin reached the conclusion that small holdings constituted only a tiny fraction of the private property in land.

In the first year of the revolution the big farms disappeared. The egalitarian redistribution of the land slimmed down the larger peasant farms and had a general "levelling" effect. Between 1916 and 1919, alongside a general growth in the number of farms the number of cropless farms decreased from 11.4 to 6.5 per cent; the proportion of farms with not more than 8 dessiatines under crops decreased from 8 to 3 per cent; those with from 4 to 8 dessiatines under crops decreased from 21.6 to 16.4 per cent while, on the contrary, the small farms (up to 4 dessiatines under crops) sharply increased - from 59 to 74 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Thus the predominant element in agriculture was now the small peasant farms, which accounted for 90 per cent of all farms in the Soviet Republic. And, as Lenin said, it was this 90 per cent of the peasantry who put their trust and support in the Soviet Government in its difficult struggle against the counter-revolution.

Enormous changes occurred not only in the peasants' use of the land. The work animals were also redistributed and most farms now had one horse.

So in all economic sectors there was a clear reduction in the number of very poor peasants, a disappearance of the upper strata in the villages and a sharp increase in the number of small farmers of average means, who made up the full of the peasantry. This meant the village was socially transformed. The former sharp class distinctions had been wiped out by the revolution. The land, animals, and implements were now distributed more or less evenly, "there has been a levelling out, an equalisation, in the village, that is, the old sharp division into kulaks and cropless peasants has disappeared. Everything has become more equable. the peasantry

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Pyat let vlasti Sovetov* (Five Years of Soviet Power), Moscow, 1922, p. 355 (in Russian).

in general has acquired the status of the middle peasant".<sup>1</sup>

*The abolition of the estates and the sharp reduction in large kulak-type farms gave the dominant position in the countryside to the small peasant farm, mainly that of the middle peasant.* This slimming down was the direct result of the agrarian revolution, of its deep penetration into peasant life. The redistribution of land resources in favour of peasants with little or no land carried out on the basis of nationalisation and the egalitarian principle fragmented the peasant economy and radically transformed the whole socio-economic structure of the countryside.

There were some agrarian theoreticians, however, who maintained that this fragmentation and diminishment of the peasant farms were the result of the mistaken agrarian policies of the Party and the Soviet government, which, so they alleged, ran counter to the spirit of Marxism. Such claims are quite unjustified because the process of fragmentation and diminishment of peasant farms was historically inevitable; it was called forth by deep-going economic and political factors without which the October Socialist Revolution could not have been victorious.

In assessing this historically necessary process one must remember its dual role. *On the one hand, it had a positive significance* because the peasant masses were given the opportunity of finding out through practical experience the economic disadvantages of small-commodity individual farming and the need to take the road to large-scale social farming; *on the other hand, it had negative effects* in that the reduction in size of peasant farms inevitably brought about a temporary fall in the productivity of agriculture, with consequent undeniable economic losses.

The Communist Party was well aware of this historically inevitable process. While the Socialist-Revolutionaries dreamed of perpetuating the predominance of small peasant farming, the Bolsheviks, in adopting this step, had openly and directly stated that small-commodity farming would never rid the working peasants of poverty, and that they must think about creating a socialised economy in agriculture. The Bolsheviks had not forgotten Engels's advice: "We of course are decidedly on the side of the small peasant; we shall do everything at all permissible to make his lot more bearable, to facilitate his transition to the co-operative should he decide to do so, and even to make it possible for him to remain on his small holding for a protracted length of time to

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 216.

think the matter over, should he still be unable to bring himself to this decision."<sup>1</sup>

The classics of Marxism-Leninism emphasised that the small peasant farm, however tenaciously it clung on to its existence, must inevitably be swept away in the course of economic development. Engels pointed this out more than once. It was the duty of the proletarian party, he wrote, "to make clear to the peasants again and again that their position is absolutely hopeless as long as capitalism holds sway, that it is absolutely impossible to preserve their small holdings for them as such, that capitalist large-scale production is absolutely sure to run over their impotent antiquated system of small production as a train runs over a pushcart".<sup>2</sup> But at the same time Engels was categorically against any coercion in relation to the peasants. "...We foresee the inevitable doom of the small peasant but ... it is not our mission to hasten it by any interference on our part."<sup>3</sup>

The Party firmly maintained this line and, in doing so, won the complete confidence of the mass of working peasants. Moreover, it should be remembered that in the conditions of the Soviet system the small peasant was very different from the peasant of pre-revolutionary Russia or any capitalist country. The October Socialist Revolution changed the whole course of development of the Soviet peasantry. Before the revolution they had been developing along the capitalist road and were continually involved in bankruptcy, expropriation and "depeasantising". This gave rise to polarisation, with kulaks at one end and very poor peasants at the other. The middle peasants were an unstable, disintegrating stratum, a small part of which moved up into the rich peasant bracket and became capitalist entrepreneurs while the majority either somehow managed to retain their middle-peasant status or slid down among the rural poor and village proletariat.

Under Soviet power the picture was quite different. The great advances achieved had sharply reduced the distance between the two poles. The number of middle peasants had grown and the poor had decreased, and while the kulaks still had a fairly firm hold on their positions they were strictly limited in their ability to exploit, on the one hand by the control exercised by the peasant masses themselves and, on the other, by the laws passed by the

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Engels, "The Peasant Question in France and Germany", Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1973, p. 471.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 472.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 470.



Soviet Government. Thus *rural differentiation was quite different now from what it had been before the revolution*. The middle peasant had become the central figure, the basic productive force in Soviet agriculture. Thanks to the steady application of Lenin's agrarian policy the process of building up the middle peasant stratum forged ahead in subsequent years, right up to the time of total collectivisation.

Of course, from the *economic* point of view this socio-economic process was damaging to the development of agriculture's productive forces because small-scale agriculture could not develop according to the laws of expanded reproduction. What was more, from the *political* standpoint this process was extremely unfavourable and led to great difficulties for the Party in guiding the peasant masses. With the growth of the petty-bourgeois intermediate strata the petty-bourgeois ideology also gained ground and provided favourable soil for the spread of reformism and opportunism. This ideology was bound to penetrate the ranks of the working-class party and affect its more unstable and wavering elements.

At the same time the Communist Party was fully aware that in the conditions that Russia offered this socio-economic process was historically inevitable and could not be jumped over without the risk of serious political consequences. But *inasmuch as this process was objectively inevitable it was also historically transient*. The Party's attitude towards the small peasant economy was clearly expressed in its agrarian programme, passed at the Eighth Party Congress in 1919.

The programme stated: "Taking into account the fact that the small peasant economy will exist for a long time, the RCP seeks to take a number of measures designed to improve the productivity of peasant farming. These measures are (1) regulation of peasant land use (elimination of strip farming, long strips of land, etc.) (2) provision of peasants with better seed and artificial fertilisers (3) improvement of peasant livestock (4) dissemination of scientific farming knowledge (5) helping the peasants to farm scientifically (6) repairs for peasants' agricultural implements in Soviet repair shops (7) creation of hiring stations, experimental institutions, model fields, etc. and (8) improvement of peasant lands."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 2, p. 54.

#### 4. DIVISION OF THE BIG ESTATES— AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION FOR WINNING THE PEASANTRY OVER TO THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

The Communist Party's solution of the agrarian question was a splendid example of the creative application of Marxist agrarian theory to the specific historical conditions in Russia. The party immediately set about dividing up the confiscated estates among the peasants, even though this contradicted all Social-Democratic dogmas on the subject. The need for abolishing private landownership was officially recognised by many Western Social-Democratic parties because this was an urgent economic need and besides, such a measure corresponded to the revolutionary-democratic demands of the mass of working peasantry. But as soon as it came to the practical solution of the problem, the Social-Democratic theoreticians cited the Marxist proposition on the advantages of large-scale farming and flatly refused to confiscate the big estates. They placed their theoretical dogmas higher than the interests of the working people even when these dogmas came into contradiction with reality and prevented the success of revolution.

The opponents of Leninism launched their main attack on the Bolshevik Party for carrying out an agrarian reform that put an end to large-scale landownership and benefited the small peasant farmer. The first critic of the agrarian reform was the Right-wing socialist Karl Kautsky, who poured scorn on the October Socialist Revolution and its great agrarian achievements. In his book *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, published in 1918, he deliberately distorted the first Soviet decrees on land and presented them as the legalisation of total anarchy in landownership. He mourned the destruction of the big estates, ignored the abolition of private landownership and nationalisation of all land, and denied the progressive revolutionary significance of egalitarian land use.

Claiming that the agrarian laws passed by the Soviet Government were not socialist at all, Kautsky proposed a petty-bourgeois agrarian programme that would preserve the big estates while the rest of the land was divided up into small plots and rented out to the peasants who needed it. He insisted that this programme should be carried out not under a dictatorship of the proletariat, which he rejected, but in the conditions of a parliamentary bourgeois republic. In other words, he was asking for just what the

Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries had proposed when they put their hopes in the Constituent Assembly.

Lenin's criticism of this petty-bourgeois agrarian programme was devastating and showed Kautsky's complete departure from Marxism. In his classical work "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky" Lenin gave scientific arguments for the Communist Party's agrarian policy in the socialist revolution and convincingly showed the great transformative significance of the first agrarian laws passed by the Soviet Government, thanks to which a new land system had been set up in Russia, "an agrarian system which is the *most flexible* from the point of view of the transition to socialism".<sup>1</sup> In a profound analysis of the objectives of the October Socialist Revolution Lenin pointed out the progressive revolutionary significance of egalitarian land use as a temporary but necessary measure which accelerated the conclusion of the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution. "It was the Bolsheviks who strictly differentiated between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution: by carrying the former through, they opened the door for the transition to the latter."<sup>2</sup>

The Social-Democratic theoreticians offered the following counter-arguments. [*First*] they claimed, the fragmentation of the estates contradicted the theoretical proposition of Marxism on the advantages of large-scale farming over small-scale farming; [*second*] the abolition of large-scale farming narrowed the material base for growth of the agricultural proletariat while expanding that base for the petty-bourgeoisie; and [*third*], the destruction of large-scale landownership would cause a decline in agricultural productivity, which would threaten the towns with food shortages.

Kautsky, one of the bitterest critics of the Bolsheviks' agrarian policy, wrote: "It is in the field of socialisation of agricultural enterprises that the biggest difficulties for the socialist regime arise....

We have already pointed out how they (the Bolsheviks—S. T.) are trying to end the exploitation of wage labour in agriculture: by dividing up all the larger farms—not only those that can properly be called big, but the medium-sized as well—and reducing all agricultural production to the level of family farms. If it were actually possible to combine this economic reaction in the countryside with social revolution in the towns, the consequences would be catas-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 313-14.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 311.

trophic. Because a dwarf-like farm cannot produce sufficient surplus product if indeed it can produce any.

These were the arguments of the Social-Democratic theoreticians like Kautsky, Bauer and the Menshevik-Trotskyist ideologists who went along with them. Under a mask of socialist phraseology they tried to pose as "defenders" of Marxism. In fact, however, the arguments were permeated with reformism from beginning to end and had nothing to do with revolutionary Marxist tactics. *These arguments could not stand up to criticism from either the economic or the political standpoint.* And it is no accident that the bourgeois professors of economics also criticised the Communist Party's agrarian policy from similar false positions.

Professor A. A. Kaufman, a well-known agrarian economist of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, accused Lenin—of departing from Marxism. Analysing Lenin's work "The Development of Capitalism in Russia" the professor prefers it to the agrarian reform carried out by the Soviet Government. Unable to reconcile himself to the abolition of large-scale landownership carried out by the Bolsheviks during the October Revolution of 1917, Kaufman reproaches Lenin for pursuing a land programme that runs absolutely counter to all the principles of Marxism and all its views of the normal (and feasible) course of social-economic evolution.<sup>2</sup>

*Now let us examine the first argument—the economic aspect.* There can be no doubt that large-scale farming has an advantage over small-scale farming. This was brilliantly demonstrated by the Marxist classics. It was Lenin himself who smashed the anti-Marxist concepts advanced by the petty-bourgeois ideologists of Western Social-Democracy. Vladimir David and Herz, who advocated the so-called theory of the stability of the small peasant farm. It is Lenin we have to thank for the ideological refutation of the petty-bourgeois agrarian theory maintained by the Social-Revolutionaries and other Narodnik theoreticians who denied the advantages of large-scale farming and wanted to perpetuate the domination of the small-commodity peasant economy.

But in that case the question naturally arises whether the Bolsheviks were right in dividing up the estates. Certainly they were right. Experience has proved it. It must be remembered that, although the estates in Russia were engaged in large-scale farming,

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K. Kautsky *The Proletarian Revolution and Its Programme* Berlin pp. 350-5

<sup>2</sup> A. A. Kaufman *The Agrarian Question in Russia* pp. 94-95 (in Russian)

the majority of them were run on a medieval rather than a capitalist basis. They were generally feudal in their methods and management. As we have already pointed out the bulk of the land owned by big proprietors was either rented out to the peasants or, even if not rented out, still cultivated by the same kind of primitive implements that the peasants had at their disposal. No wonder then that productivity per unit of land area in the small peasant economy was considerably higher than on the estates, where the land was still worked by peasant implements. A dessiatine of peasant land yielded more produce than a dessiatine of landlord's land cultivated by semi-feudal peasant labour and implements on a métayer basis.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin pointed out that "the yield on the landlords' lands cultivated by peasants on a métayer or other such basis is lower than the yield on allotment land",<sup>2</sup> and that "insofar as the landlords' lands are still cultivated by the bonded peasant with his antiquated implements, methods, etc., to that extent landlordism is the principal cause of backwardness and stagnation.... Even if this yield were increased only to the allotment-land level, the progress would be tremendous".<sup>3</sup>

So how could one mourn "large-scale" farming that actually inhibited the development of the productive forces in agriculture? When it boldly undertook to break up the big estates the Bolshevik Party was working on the basis of Leninist proposition: insofar as considerable vestiges of feudalism were evident in the economy of the big estate, insofar as the master of that estate was more of a landowner than a capitalist producer, to that extent the revolutionary movement of the peasantry for the destruction of large-scale landownership was in the highest degree a progressive movement. So the taking over of the big estates by small peasant farms was more progressive than large-scale medieval feudal-landlord farming.

This conclusion applied not only to Russia but also to other countries where the landlord was more of a landowner than a producer. Even in the West European countries, where the landlord's estate comprised far more progressive capitalist-production ele-

<sup>1</sup> The figures we have already given on this point should be recalled. On average, from allotment lands the peasant raised a yield of 54 poods of grain per dessiatine, from landlords' land that he worked on the métayer system, 50 poods, and from land that he rented annually from a landlord only 45 poods.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Question in Russia Towards the Close of the Nineteenth Century", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

ments than in Russia, the first target of attack should be landlord landownership in general because, as Lenin said, the movement of the peasant masses cannot be directed only against certain individual categories of landlord lands; the fight must be against private landownership in general.

On the other hand, we must bear in mind that the Bolsheviks were always reluctant to break up large well-farmed estates, because they believed that these estates should be preserved and turned into state-run model farms. And this was how the Party proceeded after the October Socialist Revolution. The trouble was that there were too few of such well-farmed estates in Russia. However, this did not detract from the tremendously progressive role played by the agrarian revolution, which swept aside the medieval feudal relationships and created a new agrarian structure throughout the country.

*The second argument* used by the Social-Democratic and Menshevik theoreticians in assessing the new balance of class forces in the villages was equally untenable. With the abolition of large-scale farming the sphere of application of wage labour would naturally be restricted and this would inevitably lead to a sharp reduction in the numbers of the agricultural proletariat. But what was so bad about this? Ultimately, this was one of the major goals of the agrarian revolution, which not only expropriated the owners of the big estates but also freed a huge army of propertyless peasants from wage slavery and raised them to the status of middle peasants. So the sharp reduction in the number of peasants with too little land and the abolition of landlessness were one of the key objectives of the October Socialist Revolution.

And finally, let us consider the *third argument*, concerning the reduced productivity of agriculture with its new small-commodity peasant economy. Yes, the Leninists replied, a temporary fall in agricultural productivity is inevitable during this transition period. Every revolution entails unavoidable economic and production losses. No wonder these losses made themselves strongly felt in Russia, where the socialist revolution was repositioning the very pillars of life.

The Bolsheviks were confident, however, that the decline would be only a temporary phenomenon. The true Marxist revolutionary should not hesitate to make this small retreat. "...The objection usually raised to this, namely, that large-scale farming is technically superior, often amounts to an indisputable theoretical truth, being replaced by the worst kind of opportunism and betrayal of the revolution. To achieve the success of this revolution, the prole-

tariat should not shrink from a temporary decline in production.... What is most important to the bourgeois is production for the sake of production; what is most important to the working and exploited population is the overthrow of the exploiters and the creation of conditions that will permit the working people to work for themselves, and not for the capitalists."<sup>1</sup>

Here, as we see it, a new element emerges and this element has a bearing on the political aspect of the agrarian question, which incidentally the opponents of Leninism distorted. The political aspect was crucial to the victory of the October Socialist Revolution. It was thanks to Lenin's wise agrarian policy that the internal counter-revolution and foreign intervention were defeated by the forces of the heroic working class and working peasantry.

But history records another example when because of grave mistakes in the agrarian question a socialist revolution ended in failure. This was the case in the Hungarian socialist revolution of 1919. The Hungarian Communists displayed maximum courage and heroism in the struggle for power, for socialism. But it must be acknowledged that the big mistake of the Hungarian Communist Party was that it did not break up the big estates and did not satisfy the peasants' demands for land. This was where it miscalculated.

One must bear in mind that the situation in the Hungarian villages at that time was approximately the same as in Russia. In a study based on statistics A. Hevesy pointed out that Hungary's agricultural population was 60 per cent of the total, and that 72 per cent of all the peasants owned only 15 per cent of the cultivated land. "The sole master of the country's political life....," Hevesy wrote, "is the big landowner."<sup>2</sup> It would seem to be obvious that the landowners' estates should immediately after the revolution have been divided up among the working peasantry, but this did not happen.

The Hungarian peasants received none of the landlords' land, which was turned into state farms. This naturally aroused great disappointment among the peasantry with regard to the proletarian revolution. "...No wonder the Hungarian peasants, about one-third of whom are small holders, could not understand the essence of socialisation and would not hear either of communes or large-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> A. Hevesy, "*Problema vengerskogo krest'yanstva*" (The Problem of the Hungarian Peasantry), *Krest'vansky Internatsional* (Peasant International), 1924, No. 1, pp. 61, 62, 64 (in Russian).

scale collective farming. In vain the Hungarian Soviet Government urged them to support the worker-peasant power; they refused to supply the urban workers with grain and Hungary, an agricultural country, was left without grain....<sup>1</sup>

The Hungarian Communists failed to link the socialist revolution with the peasant movement. As a result, the peasants received no share of the big estates and lost faith in receiving any other help from the Hungarian Soviet Government. From what it saw of the government's agrarian policy the peasantry could only feel that their own land was about to be socialised. This was undeniably a mistake, one of the mistakes that destroyed the revolution. Nevertheless, even after its defeat some theoreticians continued to assert that abolition of the big estates ran counter to Marxist doctrine. Such is the sad lesson of history.

To sum up, the Bolsheviks' agrarian tactics in the October Revolution were an impressive practical embodiment of Leninist theory, which enabled them to win the broad mass of the peasants over to the socialist revolution and bring about its decisive victory. In a peasant country like Russia the fate of the revolution depended on the solution of the agrarian and peasant question. It would be no exaggeration to say that the Bolsheviks' historical experience in dealing with this most complex and urgent problem, the agrarian and peasant problem, provides a brilliant example of revolutionary Marxist tactics.

## 5. PREDOMINANCE OF THE PETTY-BOURGEOIS PEASANT ECONOMY AND THE LENINIST PRINCIPLES OF SOCIALIST FARMING

The first results of the deep-going socio-economic changes brought about by the revolution were summed up by Lenin in his historic work "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", written in April 1918. The characteristic feature of the period from the October 1917 uprising to March 1918 was the vigorous attack on capital and the revolutionary abolition of big landownership. In supporting the spontaneous workers' movement against the capitalists and the spontaneous peasants' movement against the landlords,

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<sup>1</sup> M. Gabor, "Comment tomba le pouvoir soviétique en Hongrie" (Report on the Fall of Soviet Power in Hungary), *L'Internationale Communiste*, No. 7-8, 1919, p. 1198.



the Communist Party worked on the assumption that the resistance of the exploiting classes could not be broken without unleashing the revolutionary initiative of the masses.

What was more, Lenin felt that it would be highly beneficial for the proletariat and the poorer peasants to go through the stage of spontaneous seizure of the factories and land and learn to act on their own, to "swim independently" in the surging waves of the revolutionary flood. Only through their own revolutionary experience could they be convinced of the need to set up a centralised organisation of socialist production in the towns and an economically effective way of using the land in the countryside. And it must be admitted that *in passing through this stage of spontaneous struggle the mass of the people actually did acquire a splendid training in revolutionary unity and economic know-how*.

When the peace treaty signed at Brest gave the Soviet Republic its first short respite, the Party raised the slogan of a temporary halt in the attack on capital so as to be able to put the Soviet economy in order. "That is why we are faced with a new and higher form of struggle against the bourgeoisie, the transition from the very simple task of further expropriating the capitalists to the much more complicated and difficult task of creating conditions in which it will be impossible for the bourgeoisie to exist, or for a new bourgeoisie to arise."<sup>1</sup>

To prepare the ground for a deeper and broader offensive Lenin proposed concentrating on the problems of economic organisation, on mastering the mechanics of economic management. "Up to now measures for the direct expropriation of the expropriators were in the forefront. Now the organisation of accounting and control in those enterprises in which the capitalists have already been expropriated, and in all other enterprises, advances to the forefront."<sup>2</sup> In accordance with this task he set out new demands: "Keep regular and honest accounts of money, manage economically, do not be lazy, do not steal, observe the strictest labour discipline—it is these slogans, justly scorned by the revolutionary proletariat when the bourgeoisie used them to conceal its rule as an exploiting class, that are now, since the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, becoming the immediate and the principal slogans of the moment."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 244-45.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* pp. 243-44.

Even then Lenin theoretically substantiated the basic principles of the new economic policy for the period of transition from capitalism to socialism. The first steps in this policy were to be: use of bourgeois specialists under the control of the Soviet Government and granting them higher rates of pay, introduction of one-man management of enterprises and payment on a piece-rate basis, and use of bourgeois co-operation to fight grain profiteering. This whole system of measures marked the gradual adoption of "state capitalism" under the control of the organs of Soviet power.

It must be admitted that the introduction of this system of economy aroused violent opposition from the Trotskyites, the "Left Communists" and others who were opposed both to the signing of the Brest treaty and calling a halt in the attack on capital, in other words, to the principles of state capitalism. Making a great show of their ultra-revolutionary attitudes, they accused Lenin of departing from Marxism and capitulating to the bourgeoisie. It cost Lenin a great deal of effort to expose the opposition's mistakes and convince the Party of the need to adopt the new economic measures. In his "Report on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government" delivered at a session of the All-Russia CEC on 29 April 1918, and in his summing up, he demonstrated the mistaken views of the "Left Communists", who were in fact *surrendering proletarian positions to please the petty bourgeoisie* and had virtually aligned themselves with Socialist-Revolutionaries.

Exposing the splitting tactics of the "Left Communists", Lenin asked: "How can they regard state capitalism as the chief enemy?" And he replied: "They ought not to forget that in the transition from capitalism to socialism our chief enemy is the petty bourgeoisie, its habits and customs, its economic position. The petty proprietor fears state capitalism above all, because he has only one desire—to grab, to get as much as possible for himself, to ruin and smash the big landowners, the big exploiters. In this the petty proprietor eagerly supports us.

"Here he is more revolutionary than the workers, because he is more embittered and more indignant, and therefore he readily marches forward to smash the bourgeoisie—but not as a socialist does in order, after breaking the resistance of the bourgeoisie, to begin building a socialist economy based on the principles of firm labour discipline, within the framework of a strict organisation, and observing correct methods of control and accounting—but in order, by grabbing as much as possible for himself, to exploit the fruits of victory for himself and for his own ends, without the least

concern for general state interests and the interests of the class of working people as a whole."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin discussed the question of the theoretical differences with the "Left Communists" in his "'Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality", written in May 1918. Besides analysing the changes in the country's social and economic life, this work provides the theoretical basis for the Party's new economic policy in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism. Lenin proposed using the first respite to create conditions for the proletariat, which now had full power in its hands, to radically improve the condition of the peasants so that they should feel how different it was now compared with the capitalist system. Only this, he stressed, would create the foundation for a normal socialist society.

Lenin showed that after the first reforms carried out by the Soviet Government five different socio-economic structures had emerged in Russia's economy (1) the patriarchal, that is, largely a subsistence, peasant economy (2) small-commodity production, involving most of the peasants who sold grain (3) private capitalism, mainly the kulaks (4) state capitalism and (5) socialism. This complex stratification created great difficulties for the Party in economic management. No wonder therefore that the most serious differences of opinion arose over economic policy.

The "Left Communists" in alliance with the Trotskyites regarded state capitalism as the biggest danger for socialist construction and totally ignored the petty-bourgeois element. But experience was soon to make it quite clear this was where the main danger lay. Referring to the many different structures of the peasant economy, Lenin asked: "Between what elements is this struggle being waged if we are to speak in terms of economic categories such as 'state capitalism'? Between the fourth and the fifth in the order in which I have just enumerated them? Of course not. It is not state capitalism that is at war with socialism, but the petty bourgeoisie plus private capitalism fighting together against both state capitalism and socialism."<sup>2</sup>

On the basis of concrete facts it was shown that the main "internal enemy" of economic construction was the profiteers and the private traders, who were undermining the state monopoly and

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Session of the All-Russia C.E.C.", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 336.

building up huge capital out of the shortages. "We know perfectly well that the economic basis of profiteering is both the small proprietors, who are exceptionally widespread in Russia, and private capitalism, of which *every* petty bourgeois is an agent. We know that the million tentacles of this petty-bourgeois hydra now and again encircle various sections of the workers, that, *instead of state monopoly*, profiteering forces its way into every pore of our social and economic organism.

"Those who fail to see this show by their blindness that they are slaves of petty-bourgeois prejudices. This is precisely the case with our 'Left Communists'...."<sup>1</sup>

Having shown the great danger of the petty-bourgeois urge that came from the small-commodity producers and the private capitalist elements, Lenin put the question squarely: "Either we subordinate the petty bourgeoisie to our control and accounting (we can do this if we organise the poor, that is, the majority of the population or semi-proletarians, around the politically conscious proletarian vanguard, or they will overthrow our workers' power as surely and as inevitably as the revolution was overthrown by the Napoleons and Cavaignacs who sprang from this very soil of petty proprietorship."<sup>2</sup>

✱ The concept of the inevitability of transitional measures paving the way from capitalism to socialism was now more fully substantiated. Comparing the position of the young Soviet Republic with that of Germany, Lenin emphasised that what the latter had lacked was Soviet power while Russia lacked German state capitalism. So "our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare *no effort* in copying it..."<sup>3</sup>

In urging us to learn state capitalism from the Germans Lenin meant that we should use the organisational forms evolved by the bourgeoisie and give them a new content, thus modifying the forms themselves. He ruthlessly criticised those who did not want to understand the essence of a "state capitalism" which implied control by the proletarian state and which no Marxist had ever written about previously because it had never existed. It was wrong to lump this new phenomenon together with the "classical" state capitalism that had been studied and described and meant the grafting of the capitalist monopolies onto the bourgeois state in the interests of the monopolistic bourgeoisie.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 336-37.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 340.

At this point Lenin allowed the possibility of buying the industrial enterprises from the capitalists and using the capitalists themselves as specialists on condition that they gave up all resistance and honestly supported the Soviet Government. Comparing the position of the Soviet republic with that of Britain in the 1870s, Lenin wrote that what we lacked was the high degree of culture, flexibility and the habit of compromise with "the cultured capitalists who agree to 'state capitalism', who are capable of putting it into practice and who are useful to the proletariat as intelligent and experienced organisers of the *largest* types of enterprises, which actually supply products to tens of millions of people".<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly the number of "cultured" capitalists in Russia who were prepared to co-operate with the Soviet state turned out to be very small. On this point Lenin explained to Otto Bauer that in reply to the Soviet Government's proposal of co-operation the capitalists in Russia had "unanimously" decided that before entering into negotiations with this government they should try to overthrow it and regain not some but all of what they had lost. In this they were counting not only on the internal forces but also on the support of the international bourgeoisie and they were not mistaken. It was the support from outside that made the Russian capitalists "savagely" and "uncultured", adamantly opposed to any state capitalism in which the "state" meant a socialist state.

The first compromise was achieved with the old bourgeois-type co-operatives. Despite the fact that the old co-operatives had given the socialist revolution a hostile reception, the Soviet Government treated them with great consideration. It preserved the previous co-operative network, its organisational structure and funds. Of course, it was no easy task to steer the old co-operatives on to the socialist path. The Party's main task in the field of co-operative construction was to bring the co-operatives over to the side of the Soviet Government, give them a new socialist content, cleanse them of hostile elements and expand their political and economic functions thus changing the direction of their development.

Above all, the co-operatives had to be used for getting the food industry on the right lines. After the revolution the Soviet Government immediately set about creating a state food apparatus, charged with the task of laying in supplies and building up enough food reserves to keep the population supplied. But for the distribution of this food there had to be a broad and ramified distribution network that would replace the old system of private trade.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 345.

At first the Soviet Government proposed setting up a broad network of state-owned shops and carrying out the distribution of food through them. But it soon turned out that this was not feasible. The Soviet Government then decided to use the old co-operative system as a ready-made apparatus of distribution with its own broad network of organisations that had to be adapted to the work of supply and distribution. The first appeal to serve the revolution was made to the consumer co-operatives which were charged with specific obligations for food distribution among the population.

The only way of enhancing the role of co-operation, of strengthening its positions in socialist construction was to turn the whole working population into co-operators and intensify co-operation's political and economic role in the system of the national economy. As early as the end of 1917 the basic principles for organising a food supply and distribution system within the overall co-operative organisation of the working people for supply and distribution were expounded in the draft decree on consumer communes drawn up by Lenin. However, this draft got an unfriendly reception from the old bourgeois co-operators.

On 10 April 1918, after long discussion a compromise decree "On Consumer Co-operative Organisations" was adopted. This decree was a concession to the petty-bourgeois strata made necessary by the difficulties experienced after the conclusion of the Brest Treaty and the need to preserve and use the old apparatus of co-operation as an apparatus of distribution already linked with the broad mass of working people. The mistake in the decree was that it allowed the existence of general citizens' co-operatives and workers' co-operatives. Lenin wrote that the essence of the compromise was the Soviet Government's departure from the principle of bringing the whole population of a given locality together in one co-operative. "Contrary to this principle, which is the only socialist principle and which corresponds to the task of abolishing classes, the 'working-class co-operative societies' (which in this case call themselves 'class' societies only because they subordinate themselves to the class interests of the bourgeoisie) were given the right to continue to exist."<sup>1</sup>

But in conceding this point the Party emphasised that it had no intention of abandoning the socialist principles of organising co-operation and would seek to create an integral co-operative system

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 255-56.

for the working people under the leadership of the proletariat. The draft Party Programme pointed out: "Lastly and most important, the dominating influence of the proletariat over the rest of the working people must be constantly maintained, and everywhere the most varied measures must be tried with a view to facilitating and bringing about the transition from petty-bourgeois co-operatives of the old capitalist type to consumers' communes led by proletarians and semi-proletarians."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin's arguments in favour of "state capitalism" as the easiest and most effective economic road to socialism sank deep into the minds of the Communists and were accepted by the Party as the general line of economic development. But at this time the question did not go beyond theoretical discussions. Not only was the draft programme not carried out. It was not even launched. The respite was so brief that instead of "state capitalism" the Party was forced to introduce war communism and instead of administrative and economic measures to contain the petty-bourgeois elements it had to adopt measures of revolutionary coercion and extra-economic compulsion. The Civil War that broke out in the summer of 1918 and the foreign intervention compelled the Party to change its economic policy in the rural areas.

## 6. REGENERATION OF THE COMMUNAL FORM OF LAND USE

The agrarian revolution, having created a new economic system in the countryside, had also to determine the requisite form of land use. Here, too, the main role was to be played by the peasant masses, who were given every opportunity of choosing a form that would correspond to a peasant economy and promote the needs of its development. The Party proceeded not only from the subjective factor, the peasants' desire; it also considered the objective conditions of this historical process, realising that it was not the form of land use that created the system of economy but the system of economy that, as it matured, created its own, specific form of land use.

Just how correct this Marxist proposition is can be seen from the example of the agrarian relationships in Russia. In the first year of the revolution, after the abolition of large-scale private

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Draft Programme of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, Moscow, 1974, p. 137.

landownership the peasant masses were confronted with three possible forms of land use: (a) social cultivation of the land (b) individual and (c) communal. All these forms of land use were suited to the system of small-commodity peasant economy that had taken shape in the country. So the choice of this or that form depended entirely on the will and desire of the peasants themselves.

Of course, the best economic form might have been social cultivation of the land embracing only the sphere of collective labour without at first including the socialisation of the basic implements and means of production. From the first days of the revolution the Party had urged the peasants to take this road. But experience showed that this form of land use did not coincide with the wishes of most of the peasants, who preferred for a time at least to farm individually. And the Party could not go against the peasant majority because "joint cultivation is a difficult business and it would be madness of course for anybody to imagine that joint cultivation of the land can be decreed from above and imposed on people, because the centuries-old habit of farming on one's own cannot suddenly disappear..."<sup>1</sup>

As for individual land use that Stolypin had sought to impose, it had been disposed of by the peasants themselves even before the October Revolution and after its victory had disappeared entirely in most areas. The point was that Stolypin allotment farming as an economic system could not gain acceptance under Russian conditions.

The Stolypin system of land use was destroyed as quickly as big landownership. The course of the agrarian revolution showed that whereas the first form of land use—social cultivation of the land—had not been accepted by the majority of peasants because of its novelty, the second—individual—was firmly rejected as something that contradicted historically formed peasant traditions. The revolution forcefully revealed the desire of the absolute majority of peasants, particularly the middle section, for egalitarian communal land use, the kind of land use for which they fought with as much energy and determination as they had fought for the land itself and the abolition of the big estates.

The development of capitalism in agriculture and Stolypin's agrarian reforms had undermined the peasant communes, but they could not destroy them. The statistics for 48 gubernias of European Russia show that in 1917 there were 8 million peasant farms.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 502.



i.e., 51 per cent, run on the principle of individual land use, while 7.4 million farms, i.e., 49 per cent, were organised in communes.

But, as we have already pointed out, in the very first year of the revolution the land commune was completely restored not only where it had been forcibly destroyed but also in areas where it had long since died out owing to profound economic factors. Naturally, the first laws passed by the Soviet Government had played a big part in reasserting communal land use.

The fact was that the October Revolution had checked the disintegration of the commune, and its agrarian reforms, carried out on the egalitarian principle of land redistribution, had led to the restoration and development of communal land use.

*Capitalism had undermined the land commune, but the proletarian revolution restored it and prepared the ground for its advance towards socialism.*

The question naturally arises whether the return to communal land use in the conditions of the Soviet system was a progressive phenomenon or a step back. We can affirm that the regeneration of the communal form of land use as a transitional measure in the conditions of the Soviet system was undoubtedly a *progressive* phenomenon and fully corresponded to the economic structure that had established itself as a result of the October victory. Experience confirmed the correctness of the Party's agrarian policy, which brought about the triumph of the socialist revolution in the villages.

But it should be remembered that an intense ideological struggle still raged over this question and would not be settled for some years. The opponents of communal land use accused the Party of abandoning its agrarian programme and adopting a position of support for the Narodnik kind of commune, which it had once severely criticised. Such theoreticians could not understand the historical role of communal land use in the new conditions. They went on reiterating the old formulas that they had learned by rote. *First*, they said, the commune was not good because it hindered the development of agriculture; *second*, it was harmful because it was supported by the Narodniks; and *third*, the commune was unacceptable because it was criticised by Marxists.

Of course, if we consider the commune as it was before the revolution, everything stated above fully accords with reality. But what the exponents of dogmatic formulas could not understand was that the Soviet land commune, having passed through the crucible of the agrarian revolution, bore little or no resemblance

to the old Narodnik commune, which was doomed to extinction. *The new Soviet land commune was a creation of the October Socialist Revolution, which had purged it of all the trappings of medievalism and freed it from mutual responsibility, enslaving agreements, coercion and economic restrictions. The Russian commune, which Lenin had defined as an association for owning allotment land now became a truly equal association of free working peasants.* In effect the Soviet land commune was a kind of co-operative, the lowest stage of co-operation.

The opponents of communal land use did not understand the internal evolution of the commune, did not understand its dual character, which had been pointed out by Marx. "Its (the commune's—S.T.) congenital dualism (social landownership and individual land use—S.T.)," he wrote, "presents the alternative that either the private ownership principle will gain the upper hand over the collective principle or the latter will prevail over the former. Everything depends on the historical environment in which it is placed."<sup>1</sup> Need it be said that the victorious socialist revolution had created for the commune exactly the kind of historical environment in which it would inevitably develop towards intensification of the collective principle.

The founders of Marxism had some interesting things to say about the possible prospects of development of communal land use in Russia. In a letter to Vera Zasulich Marx wrote: "It (the Russian commune—S.T.) is unique in Europe in that it still remains the organic predominant form of rural life in a vast empire. Communal ownership of the land gives it the natural base of collective appropriation, while its historical environment—simultaneous existence of capitalist production alongside it—provides the commune with the ready-made material conditions for cooperative labour organised on a broad scale. It may consequently avail itself of all the positive gains made by the capitalist system without passing under its Caudine Forks. With the help of the machines for which the physical configuration of the Russian soil is so favourable it can gradually replace parcelled cultivation with combined cultivation. Once it has been brought into a normal state in its present form, it can immediately become the point of departure for the economic system towards which modern society is striving, and begin to live a new life without resorting to suicide."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marx, Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 19, Berlin, 1962, S. 404.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, S. 404.

Marx, of course, was well aware of the defects and dangers of the old feudal peasant commune—chiefly its economic seclusion and isolation, which held up the economic and cultural development of the rural areas. But he believed that these defects stemming from the domination of feudal relations would easily be removed after the victory of the socialist revolution. "And as for the curse," Marx wrote, "which hangs over the commune—its isolation, the absence of links between the life of one commune and that of others, this *localised microcosm*, which has always deprived it of any historical initiative and does so to this day? That will disappear amidst the general upheaval of Russian society."<sup>1</sup>

We find the same ideas in Engels, who expressed his belief that with the victory of the proletarian revolution in the West the Russian commune could become a point of departure for socialist development. This is what he wrote: "...There is undoubtedly a possibility of making this social form into a higher form, if it survives until the conditions mature for such a transformation, and if it proves capable of developing, that is, if the peasants will cultivate the soil not individually but together, there is a possibility of making it into this higher form without the Russian peasants having to pass through the intermediate stage of bourgeois parcelled property. But this can happen only if, before the final disintegration of communal property, a victorious proletarian revolution is accomplished in Western Europe, that will provide the Russian peasants with the conditions for such a transition, namely, the material means they will need to revolutionise their whole system of agriculture."<sup>2</sup>

Admittedly, Engels said that the development of the Russian commune depended on the victory of a proletarian revolution in the West but this, as we know, was forestalled by the proletarian revolution in Russia, which performed in relation to the commune the historical role that Marx and Engels had assigned to a western revolution. *The October revolution did indeed regenerate the land commune and give it new features, and at the next stage (as will be shown in the second volume of this book) it prepared it for the transition to a higher form, thus turning the land communes into strongpoints for the socialist transformation of the country's agriculture.*

We have no intention of idealising the land commune, of course, and there is no need to do so. What we are trying to do is to

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, S. 405.

<sup>2</sup> Marx, Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 18, Berlin, 1969, S. 565.

reconstruct a historically accurate picture of the situation which then existed in the Soviet village. *One cannot deny the historical fact that the pre-revolutionary peasantry of Russia had not gone through the school of capitalist management. On the other hand, it had extremely rich experience, habits and traditions of communal land use.* Was this good or bad? To answer this question one must take a concrete historical approach. Of course, in the conditions of pre-revolutionary Russia the communal form of land use heavily impeded the development of the productive forces. It was undoubtedly a lower stage in comparison with large-scale landownership. From the economic point of view it was less profitable even in the context of the Soviet system, because it relied on small, low-productivity peasant farms.

⑦ *But whereas immediately after the revolution the conditions for a large-scale socialised economy had not yet matured and capitalist landownership was unacceptable in principle, the communal form was naturally the most suitable for the transitional period.* Not only did it not hinder the profound socialist transformation of the countryside. On the contrary, it encouraged it and facilitated the Party's work in spreading co-operation among the mass of the peasants. From the political standpoint the peasant commune, as we shall show, played the outstanding role that the classics of Marxism had assigned to it in the event of a victorious proletarian revolution.

As for its *darker sides*, such as its urge to divide the land equally, the endless splitting up of the land, the Party in the first years of the revolution took a number of measures in land use surveying to limit such fragmentation. For example, in its decree of 30 April 1920 the Soviet Government fixed the time limits for redistributions—after three-field crop rotation. In addition, permission of the appropriate land agencies was required in every specific case. A decree of 27 May of the same year excluded “intensively cultivated farms” (with multi-field crop rotations, industrial crops such as flax, sugarbeet and tobacco) regardless of the forms of land use. Although it was difficult to stop the spontaneous urge to redistribute the land, the steps taken were the first towards stabilising land use. In subsequent years even more was done in this direction.

## CHAPTER XII

# DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION IN THE RURAL AREAS. RALLYING OF THE WORKING MASSES OF THE PEASANTRY AROUND THE WORKING CLASS

## 1. DEMARCATION OF CLASS FORCES AMONG THE PEASANTRY AND INTENSIFICATION OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE VILLAGE

The Party was fully aware that the Russian peasantry, despite the predominance of feudal relationships in the pre-revolutionary village, had been drawn into the stream of capitalist development. This meant that it was no longer a single class. It was becoming stratified and its interests in the revolution varied accordingly. The October Revolution, which had been accomplished by the working class in alliance with the poorer peasants, had the support of the whole peasantry insofar as it completed the bourgeois-democratic revolution, insofar as it destroyed the class of landowners and the vestiges of feudal relationships. But as soon as the revolution tackled socialist problems, it encountered profound class contradictions within the peasantry itself.

These contradictions came out particularly strongly in the summer of 1918, when the big estates were being divided up. Understandably, the abolition of landed proprietorship and the division of the confiscated land did not proceed in exactly the same way in all districts because the conditions of land use in Russia were extremely varied. It was not a matter of distributing technique but of what forces appeared on the scene and what class interests clashed in the course of the actual realisation of the great land reform.

In the struggle to get rid of landed proprietorship and divide up the confiscated land there at once appeared two class trends, which subsequently became sharply pronounced. *On the one hand*, the kulaks and the well-to-do villagers tried to carry out the land reform without any radical break-up of the old land relations. They hoped to confine it merely to adding strips of land to the peasant farms on the basis of subsistence or labour standards, thus guaranteeing for themselves the best lands, which they had

acquired in the days of tsarism and the bourgeois Provisional Government. *On the other hand*, the poor peasants demanded a radical break-up of the old land relations, the revolutionary abolition of large-scale private property in land.

By the summer of 1918 these two class forces had come out into the open. "The village was no longer united. The peasants, who had fought as one man against the landowners, now split into two camps—the camp of the more prosperous peasants and the camp of the poor peasants who, side by side with the workers, continued their steadfast advance towards socialism and changed from fighting the landowners to fighting capital, the power of money, and the use of the great land reform for the benefit of the kulaks."<sup>1</sup>

The working peasants showed quite plainly that what they wanted was to disenclose all the lands, then redistribute them on an egalitarian basis. By this means they hoped to destroy all forms of exploitation. This revolutionary demand of the working peasants was consistently supported by the Party, which used every means to carry out its land policy in favour of the poor peasants. So in many parts of the country all the land was at first disenclosed and then divided up among the peasant farms on the egalitarian principle and at the expense of the agricultural bourgeoisie and the prosperous peasants.

*The land question was the focus of a fresh escalation of class struggle in the villages.* Socialisation of the land on the egalitarian principle set the stage of the demarcation of class forces, the intensification of class contradictions and a mounting struggle between the village bourgeoisie and the poor people. "The more determined and consistent the break-up and elimination of the landed estates and the more determined and consistent the bourgeois-democratic agrarian reform in Russia in general, the more vigorous and speedy will be the development of the class struggle of the agricultural proletariat against the well-to-do peasants (the peasant bourgeoisie)."<sup>2</sup>

At first the peasants regarded the programme of socialisation and its egalitarian principle as the realisation of their ideal of "justice", "equality", and "fraternity". But when the land was theirs and they saw that big landownership had been done away with forever, the bad side of the petty-bourgeois egalitarian principle

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes, December 11, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 339-40.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 291.

came to the fore. There was an obvious split in the peasantry. The poor peasants and the rural proletariat quickly discovered that the egalitarian principle of land distribution was not what the working peasants had hoped for. They realised the mistake they had made in placing their hopes on egalitarianism.

From bitter experience the poorest strata in the villages came to realise that the egalitarian redistribution of the land did not give them any real rights because the kulaks and the more prosperous peasants with their capital and means of production started taking over the land that had been allotted to the poor and enslaving them. The poor peasants could not reconcile themselves to such a situation.

The middle peasants also began to see the fundamental danger of egalitarian land use. Its economic disadvantages were brought home to them in practice when they found they could not stand up to the thrust of the kulaks and were becoming increasingly dependent on them. This forced the middle peasants to join up with the poor against the kulaks. "Far better, we thought, if by their own experience and suffering the peasants themselves come to realise that equal division is nonsense. Only then could we ask them how they would escape the ruin and kulak domination that follow from the division of the land."

"Division of the land was all very well as a beginning. Its purpose was to show that the land was being taken from the land-owners and handed over to the peasants. But that is not enough. The solution lies only in socialised farming."<sup>1</sup>

However, the land question was only one aspect of the class struggle in the village. Its other aspect was food supplies. From the earliest days of Soviet power this question was the target of attention of both party and government. But by the spring of 1918 it became crucial to the destiny of the revolution. The Soviet republic was facing famine. The food situation had begun to deteriorate before the revolution and on 9 May 1918 the Council of People's Commissars reported: "Petrograd is in a situation of unprecedented catastrophe. There is no bread. The last stocks of potato flour and dried bread are being given out to the population. The red capital is on the brink of starvation."<sup>2</sup>

The food crisis inherited from the bourgeois Provisional Gov-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech at a Meeting of Delegates from the Poor Peasants' Committees of Central Gubernias, November 8, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> *Lenin Miscellany XVIII*, p. 214.

ernment demanded immediate and effective action. Food policy had to be concentrated as a part of general economic policy in the hands of the state. But the task could not be dealt with by the state apparatus alone. The rural poor, who were a powerful force capable of giving effective assistance to Soviet power on the food front, had to be drawn into the struggle for dealing with the crisis.

Although the bourgeois Provisional Government had introduced a grain monopoly, it had not been able to enforce it in practice. Its food policy had been a complete failure. This was not just because the Provisional Government did not enjoy the support and sympathy of the broad mass of the people. The main reason was its fear of involving the rural proletariat and poor peasants as an active revolutionary force capable of restraining the landlords, the village money-bags, and the profiteers.

The crisis was due largely, of course, to the general economic disruption caused by the imperialist war. But there were also other reasons, of a social nature. The rural bourgeoisie which had accumulated big stocks of grain refused to surrender them to the Soviets. Inspection showed that there was grain from the 1916-17 harvest in many gubernias that had not been occupied by the forces of the intervention. If this grain was properly distributed, the situation could be remedied. But regardless of the people's sufferings, the enemies of Soviet power preferred to turn the grain into illicit spirits, to feed their animals on it and to use it for profiteering on the black market. The problem of grain procurement thus became an arena of struggle. "This struggle seems to be only a struggle for bread, but as a matter of fact it is a struggle for socialism."<sup>1</sup>

The Soviet Government had to clamp down ruthlessly on profiteering and kulak sabotage. No policy of commodity exchange could save the situation. Extraordinary measures were needed to deal with the famine that threatened to destroy the revolution. And this meant first of all breaking the resistance of the kulaks by the force of law and confiscating the food they were hoarding. At this grave hour for the Soviet Republic Lenin said: "The workers must unite, workers' detachments must be organised, the hungry people from the non-agricultural districts must be organised—it is to them we must turn for help, it is to them our Commissariat for food appeals, it is they we call upon to join the crusade for bread,

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin. "Fourth Congress of Trade Unions", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 472.



the crusade against the profiteers and the kulaks and for the restoration of order.”<sup>1</sup>

On 9 May 1918 the Soviet Government issued a decree giving the Commissariat for Food special powers to combat the rural bourgeoisie, who were hoarding grain and using it to profiteer on the black market. By this decree the Soviet Government introduced a food dictatorship against the enemies of the revolution.

Those who hoarded grain and would not surrender it to the state were declared the enemies of the revolution, sentenced to terms of imprisonment of not less than 10 years, and banished forever from the commune, and their property was confiscated. The decree once again affirmed the inviolability of the grain monopoly and fixed prices on grain. All the work of organising food supplies was centralised in the People's Commissariat for Food, whose agencies were given special powers up to and including the right to use armed force in the event of resistance to the confiscation of grain or other food supplies.

Under Lenin's leadership the Party made titanic efforts to solve the food problem. The Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, which took place on 4-10 July 1918, approved the grain monopoly and the maintenance of fixed prices on grain and called for resolute action against grain hoarders, profiteers and kulaks. The congress pointed out specifically that “the food question is at the present moment central to our internal life. All the counter-revolutionary attempts of recent times have been fed mainly by our food difficulties.... The only way to force the grain out of the kulaks is to organise the poor peasants and to give them the most vigorous moral and material support from the urban centres of the workers' and peasants' revolution”.<sup>2</sup>

The Communist Party sent its best forces to the food front because this was where the fate of the revolution was being decided. On the Soviet Republic's gravest hour the Communist Party saved the working class and all the working people from famine and organised them for the long, hard struggle in the Civil War that was developing. The firm alliance between the working class and the poorer peasants was tempered in the fierce struggle against the counter-revolution and became an insuperable force that blazed the trail for socialist revolution in the countryside.

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Session of C.E.C., Moscow Soviet and Trade Unions”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 435.

<sup>2</sup> *Syезdy Sovetov RSFSR v postanovleniyakh i rezolyutsiyakh* (Congresses of Soviets of the RSFSR in Decisions and Resolutions), Collection of Documents, Moscow, 1939, p. 85 (in Russian).

*The land and food questions played a key role in the development of the class struggle in the countryside. The revolution was now spreading not only in breadth but also in depth, burying forever the remnants of the old life and paving the way to the new.* By the summer of 1918, having achieved great successes and strengthened its positions in the towns, it began to assert itself in the countryside, to penetrate the peasant masses and intensify their class stratification. The village was moving on from the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. And as socialist tasks, i. e., the strengthening of the power of the Soviets, the organisation and rallying of the proletarian strata of the villages, the bridling of the rural bourgeoisie, came to the fore, the class struggle grew increasingly tense and bitter. The peasantry was now completely divided and the contradictory interests and aims of its different strata in the revolution clearly emerged.

✦ The village money-bags tried to check the advance of the revolution in the countryside, to halt it at the halfway mark, to restrict it to confiscation of the landed estates, so that they could take the place of the expropriated landowners and become the politically and economically dominant class in the countryside. With this aim in view they set about using the local land committees and Soviets, in many of which they had still retained a dominant position. Through the land committees the rural bourgeoisie tried to tip the land issue in its favour, while through the Soviets it sought to assert its political power in the villages and turn the Soviets into a weapon of struggle against the proletariat and the rural poor.

It should be remembered that the land committees and the Soviets had been set up in the villages when the socialist revolution had not yet got properly moving in the countryside. The elections to the first Soviets of the post-October period were conducted without observing the class principles. So these Soviets included kulaks and other rich peasants as the most literate and influential section of the peasantry. "At first the Soviets embraced the peasants as a whole. It was owing to the immaturity, the backwardness, the ignorance of the poor peasants that the leadership passed into the hands of the kulaks, the rich, the capitalists and the petty-bourgeois intellectuals." <sup>1</sup> The Socialist-Revolutionaries, who were in the government at the time, tried to get the kulaks, other well-to-do peasants installed in the Soviets and the land committees. This was their way of breaking the common front

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 300.

that united the socialist revolution and the peasant war, of impeding the further development of the revolution, carrying out a land reform that would suit them, undermining the Soviet Government's food policy and destroying the revolution.

The enemies of Soviet power encountered tough resistance from the poor peasants and the rural proletariat, who wanted the revolution to go on from abolishing estates to bridling all rural exploiters. The kulaks had to be driven out of the Soviets and land committees, they had to be isolated and deprived of any opportunity of influencing the ignorant sections of the rural population, particularly the wavering elements among the middle peasants. The kulaks did not succeed in gaining the commanding heights in the village. They were opposed by a formidable force in the shape of the poor peasants, the rural proletariat and the middle peasants. "As events unfolding throughout Russia became more evident, the village poor realised from their own experience when they went into action what the struggle against the kulaks meant, and that to keep the cities supplied with food and to re-establish commodity exchange, without which the countryside cannot live, they must part company with the rural bourgeoisie and the kulaks. They have to organise separately. And we have now taken the first and most momentous step of the social revolution in the countryside. We could not have taken that step in October. We gauged the moment when we could approach the people. And we have now reached a point where the socialist revolution in the rural areas has begun...."<sup>1</sup>

Thus two opposing forces that were engaged in a decisive struggle had now clearly emerged in the rural areas. On the one hand there were the poorer peasants supported by the urban proletariat led by the Communist Party; on the other stood the kulaks, and other well-to-do peasants along with the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Mensheviks and other anti-revolutionary forces. "This struggle cut the property-owning and exploiting classes off from the revolution completely, it definitely put our revolution on the socialist road which the urban working class had tried so hard and vigorously to put it on in October but along which it will not be able to direct The revolution successfully unless it finds firm, deliberate and solid support in the countryside."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Extraordinary Sixth All-Russia Congress of Soviets", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The First Congress of Land Departments", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 340.

## 2. THE POOR PEASANTS AS THE POLITICAL BULWARK OF SOVIET POWER IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The October Socialist Revolution swept irresistibly across the country. Its ideas of emancipation took hold of the broad masses of the working peasantry and became a massive material force.

The process of developing the socialist revolution in the countryside was a complex one. Socialist aims had to be achieved and the bourgeois-democratic revolution had also to be carried through to its ultimate conclusion. This curious interweaving of two distinctly different phenomena made it even more important for the Party to make an all-round assessment of the situation and work out a correct class policy for the countryside, to build correct mutual relations between the proletariat and the various sections of the peasant population and to rally the working peasants around the Soviets.

In trying to keep what they had gained by the October Socialist Revolution the poor peasants and the rural proletariat became more than ever aware of the need for class organisation of their forces, for help from the urban proletariat. At the very beginning of 1918 new peasant organisations began to spring up in the form of poor peasants' committees, associations of men, who had returned from the front, communes, artels, and various other associations. All these organisations of the poorest strata of the countryside opposed the kulaks as an organised political force.

They were supported and led by the Communist Party. On 11 June 1918 the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars issued a decree on organisation of poor peasants' committees, whose task was to rally all forces capable of creative revolutionary work to strengthen the young Soviet Republic. "The formation of Poor Peasants' Committees in the rural districts was the turning point; it showed that the urban working class, which in October had united with all the peasants to crush the landowners, the principal enemy of the free, socialist Russia of the working people, had progressed from this to the much more difficult and historically more noble and truly socialist task—that of carrying the enlightening socialist struggle into the rural districts and reaching the minds of the peasants as well."<sup>1</sup>

The Poor Peasants' Committees were revolutionary-democratic organisations acting on their own initiative that included the poor-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The First Congress of Land Departments", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 340.

est peasants and the working middle peasants. Although these committees were subsidiary revolutionary establishments rather than organs of state power, they nevertheless had special powers. Under the leadership of Party organisations they changed the composition of the Soviets dominated by the kulaks, or disbanded them and elected new ones, and sometimes took full power into their own hands and actually became military revolutionary committees.

*So along with the Soviets as organs of state power there arose in the villages the Poor Peasants' Committees, the revolutionary organisations of the poor peasants and the rural proletariat.* In the shape of these committees the Communist Party and Soviet Government acquired a strong bulwark in the villages, the organised strength of the village poor defending the gains of the October Revolution side by side with the urban proletariat. By this crucial measure the Communist Party and the Soviet Government launched a new stage in the development of the class struggle and cleared the road for the victory of the socialist revolution in the countryside.

The Poor Peasants' Committees were of great historical importance in strengthening the proletarian revolution. This was "a step which lies at the very basis of our food policy and which, moreover, was a tremendously important turning-point in the whole course of development and structure of our revolution. By taking this step we crossed the boundary dividing the bourgeois from the socialist revolution. By themselves, the victory of the working class in the cities and the transfer of all the factories to the proletarian state would not have been enough to create and consolidate the foundation of a socialist system, if we had not also created for ourselves not a general peasant, but a really proletarian buttress in the countryside".<sup>1</sup>

The Soviet Government's Decree on Poor Peasants' Committees showed that the Party and government were the real defenders of the poor peasants. But it was here that the Soviet Government and the Communist Party encountered fierce resistance from all the petty-bourgeois parties. The Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks rejected the decree.

Taking advantage of the difficulties over food supply and also counting on the domination of their groups and kulaks in many of

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech at a Joint Session of the All-Russia C.E.C., the Moscow Soviet and All-Russia Trade Union Congress, January 17, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 391.

the local rural Soviets, the "Left" Socialist-Revolutionaries shifted the centre of struggle against Soviet power to the rural areas in the hope of winning the support of the peasant masses. Socialist-Revolutionary resistance to the policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government was becoming increasingly intense and open. After the session of the All-Russia CEC that passed the Decree on Poor Peasants' Committees, the party of "Left" Socialist-Revolutionaries stated outright that it would use every means to fight implementation of the decree. Along with the kulaks and other hostile forces it embarked on the path of gangster-like terror and provocation.

One month after the passing of the Decree on Poor Peasants' Committees, during the work of the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, the "Left" Socialist-Revolutionaries staged a counter-revolutionary revolt in Moscow. With the help of armed irregulars they tried to take over government institutions and depose the leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government. They were defeated on the same day, and the Fifth Congress of Soviets branded these despicable enemies of the revolution, demanding severe punishment for the criminals who had taken up arms against Soviet power. The organisers of the conspiracy were punished by the avenging arm of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the petty-bourgeois, kulak party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries suffered total collapse.

The enemies of the revolution went underground and took the path of hit-and-run terrorism. Such notable Communist Party leaders as Uritsky and Volodarsky were murdered. The most vicious act of the Socialist-Revolutionaries was the dastardly attempt on the life of the leader of the proletarian revolution. Lenin was badly wounded on the 30th of August 1918. These shots were the signal for a mass attack on Soviet power by the counter-revolutionaries. Kulaks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and White-guard officers conspired in the brutal work of beating up the Poor Peasants' Committees, pillaging food and other stores, and murdering Communists and Soviet officials.

The newspaper *Bednota* (The Poor) published the following data on the atrocities committed by the Socialist-Revolutionary and kulak bands in the Tambov and Voronezh gubernias. In four uyezds of the Tambov Gubernia about 60 state farms and 240 collective farms were pillaged, destroyed or burned. The state farms were robbed of more than 1,500 horses, 700 cows, 800 pigs and 2,600 sheep. More than ten food establishments and many consumer societies were destroyed and plundered and damage to the extent of

1,000 million rubles was caused. The kulak-Socialist-Revolutionary bands murdered over 300 active functionaries of Soviet institutions. At the Luch (Ray) commune of the Rasskazovo uyezd they killed all its members, including the children. In the Voronezh Gubernia they murdered and tortured to death 273 Communists and 298 Soviet functionaries, 194 Red Guards and 63 peasants. They pillaged more than 420,000 poods of grain and other produce, destroyed millions of rubles worth of national property, robbed the peasants of thousands of horses and oxen. The working people of the gubernia demanded that all this should be put down to the account of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.<sup>1</sup>

By means of this Whiteguard terrorism, provocations, sabotaging of food supplies and intimidation of working peasants the kulaks tried to combat the power of the Soviets and force them to retreat from their revolutionary policies. But the enemies of the revolution were badly mistaken. The Soviet Government showed great determination in dealing with these counter-revolutionary attacks. It replied to the Whiteguard terror and the attempt on Lenin's life with a mass Red terror against the bourgeoisie and its agents.

The Poor Peasants' Committees provided the bulwark that the working class needed for fighting the counter-revolution and consolidating Soviet power in the villages. At this critical time for the Soviet Republic, in the course of the tense struggle for Soviet power the Poor Peasants' Committees, led by the Party, acquired organisational shape and political hardening. By the end of October 1918, according to incomplete data, there were 31,268 such committees in the Russian Federation. In their work they relied on the workers' food-requisitioning detachments and learned from them how to organise and stand up devotedly for the cause of revolution.

The Communist Party did a great deal of organisational work in selecting the best workers and sending them to the rural areas to help the village poor. Between July 1918 and March 1919 more than 40,000 politically conscious workers were sent to the countryside. The working class offered its fraternal assistance to the working peasantry and helped them to achieve unity and rise to the highest stage of class consciousness. With the support of the Poor Peasants' Committees the workers' food-requisitioning detachments brought about a revolutionary transformation in the countryside and broke the resistance of the kulaks.

<sup>1</sup> See: *Bednota*, 31 May 1922.

The workers' food-requisitioning detachments were also organisers of Soviet power in the villages, of agricultural communes, artels, co-operative societies and other associations. These representatives of the working class along with the steadiest elements from among the poor peasants and the rural proletariat formed the source from which the Communist Party drew new, battle-hardened forces to replenish its ranks. A network of Party groups sprang up in the countryside.

At first the dispatch of workers to the villages resembled a military operation for requisitioning food stocks and workers were organised as food-requisitioning detachments. Later workers' detachments and their functions in the villages gradually changed and expanded. Besides requisitioning food they carried on cultural and educational work among the peasants. "These workers carry socialism into the countryside, win over the poor, organise and educate them, and help them to *suppress the resistance of the bourgeoisie*,"<sup>1</sup>

Each workers' detachment was led by a commissar, who was a member of the Communist Party. In every uyezd a workers' bureau of three people was set up. Under the leadership of the uyezd Party committee this bureau guided the work of the detachments. By March 1919 more than 20,000 people had been organised in such detachments, furnishing the Party with an army of organisers, propagandists and agitators who were in close touch with the rural poor and became a tremendous revolutionary force in the countryside.

The activities of the Poor Peasants' Committees and the workers' detachments were many and various. They requisitioned grain from the kulaks for the Red Army and the working class, completed the abolition of landed proprietorship, and saw to it that the land policy was carried out correctly. They strengthened the Soviets, drove out the kulaks and other counter-revolutionary elements, activated the peasant masses and turned them into an organised force that could stand up to the counter-revolution. ✦ The Poor Peasants' Committees and the workers helped to overcome the vacillation of the middle peasants. *In the second half of 1918 the middle peasants swung sharply towards support for Soviet power and joined in the general struggle against the kulaks.* The middle peasants' swing towards Soviet power was mainly due to the fact that by its tireless work among the mass of peasants, its

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 303.



devotion to the revolution, its organisation and heroism in the struggle against the counter-revolutionary forces the working class had won their confidence and made them aware of the need to fight those who were betraying the country.

But as the Poor Peasants' Committees fulfilled their class objectives the need for such special agencies gradually disappeared. To get the apparatus of state power properly organised from top to bottom it was the Soviets that had to be strengthened and turned into all-embracing organs of power both in the towns and in the countryside. Besides, things had been going wrong in certain areas. In some places the Soviets had been turned into appendages of the Poor Peasants' Committees with a consequent reduction of their status and role as organs of state power; in other cases, on the contrary, the Poor Peasants' Committees had been turned into appendages of the food-requisitioning agencies and their members had been used as requisitioning agents.

The "dual power" in the rural areas had to be eliminated. At the Meeting of Delegates of the Poor Peasants' Committees of Central Gubernias in November 1918 Lenin said: "Our Party Central Committee has drawn up a plan for reforming the Poor Peasants' Committees which will be submitted for the approval of the Sixth Congress of Soviets. We have decided that the Poor Peasants' Committees and the rural Soviets must not exist separately, otherwise there will be squabbling and too much useless talk. We shall merge the Poor Peasants' Committees with the Soviets and turn the Poor Peasants' Committees into Soviets."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin thus pointed the way to a correct solution of the problem. Since the Poor Peasants' Committees were revolutionary organisations of the poorest peasant masses acting on their own initiative it was natural that they should become the nucleus of the Soviets. This meant that the Soviets had to be re-elected everywhere on the class principle so that the poor peasants and middle peasants could be properly represented in them. The Soviets would then become organisations of the working peasants and the sole organs of government in the countryside. The Poor Peasants' Committees had thus performed their historical role and become a superfluous superstructure. They had become so well established, said Lenin, that we found it possible to replace them with properly elected Soviets, that is to say, to reorganise the rural Soviets in such

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech at a Meeting of Delegates from the Poor Peasants' Committees of Central Gubernias, November 8, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 176.

a way that they became organs of class rule, organs of proletarian power in the countryside.

In order to reinforce the integrated structure of state power from top to bottom, the Sixth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, held 6-9 November 1918, passed a resolution abolishing the Poor Peasants' Committees and decreeing that new elections be immediately held to all the village and volost Soviets. On the basis of this resolution the Party organisations nominated poor peasants for the Soviets as the guiding nucleus in the rural areas and saw to it that the middle peasants were drawn into the elections. This set the stage for the establishment of a stable revolutionary government of Soviets in the countryside. "There lies the significance of the revolution which took place this summer and autumn even in the most remote villages of Russia, a revolution which was not spectacular, not as striking and obvious as the October Revolution of last year, but whose significance is incomparably deeper and greater."<sup>1</sup>

Soviet power was thus firmly established in the countryside and helped to strengthen the alliance between the working class and the whole mass of working peasants. Large numbers of poor people who had received a splendid training in class struggle against the kulaks and the counter-revolution entered the Soviets. "Anyone who has studied rural life and come into contact with the peasants would say that it was only in the summer and autumn of 1918 that the urban October Revolution became a real rural October Revolution."<sup>2</sup>

The revolutionary drive against the counter-revolutionary kulaks showed that the peasants and the rural proletariat could become an invincible force if they were organised and aligned with the working class. Under the leadership of the Communist Party these forces destroyed the power of the capitalists and landowners in October 1917. And in 1918, developing the revolutionary struggle against the exploiters, they struck a crushing blow against the counter-revolutionary kulaks, thus crowning the victory of the socialist revolution in the countryside.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes, December 11, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Extraordinary Sixth All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers', Peasants', Cossacks' and Red Army Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 141.

### 3. THEORETICAL REASONS FOR THE PARTY'S THIRD SLOGAN ON THE PEASANT QUESTION

At every stage scientific analysis of the class stratification of the village enabled the Communist Party to define the correct positions for the working class to adopt in its relations with the various social strata of the peasantry. This was vitally important for winning over the working masses of the countryside to the proletariat. In order to appreciate the subtleties of Lenin's policy towards the peasantry one must know the class interests of each of its social groups separately. In his agrarian theses for the Second Congress of the Comintern Lenin proposed that in all capitalist countries there were five social groups of peasants (1) the rural proletariat (2) the rural semi-proletarians, mainly peasants with small plots of land (3) peasants with only a little land, or poor peasants (4) middle peasants and (5) rich peasants (kulaks).

The strongest and most reliable backing for the urban proletariat in the countryside came from the agricultural labourers, who in many capitalist countries constituted a considerable proportion of the peasant population. In the conditions of capitalism this numerous stratum was downtrodden, scattered and sometimes in a state of medieval dependence, all of which made it very difficult to draw it into the revolutionary struggle. These conditions, said Lenin, made it particularly important for the Communist Parties to intensify organisational and political-educational work among the rural proletariat. In the first place it must be organised separately from the other groups of the rural population and, secondly, rural proletarians should be energetically recruited into the Communist Parties.

Lenin particularly emphasised the need to achieve both these objectives because the success of winning over all sections of the working peasants to the side of the proletariat depended on how well the rural proletariat was organised. This is clearly illustrated by the example of the October Socialist Revolution, in which the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses of the countryside played a tremendous role because they were organised as an independent class force. "There is only one way to escape the yoke of capitalism and ensure that the people's land goes to the *working people*, and that is by organising the agricultural labourers...."<sup>1</sup> And furt-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 502.

her: "Agricultural labourers and poor peasants ... must strive their hardest to organise themselves independently into separate Soviets, or into separate groups within the general peasants' Soviets, in order to protect their interests against the rich peasants, who inevitably strive towards an alliance with the capitalists and landowners."<sup>1</sup>

Very close to the rural proletariat was the second group, the rural semi-proletarians, the parcelled peasants, who made a livelihood partly by working at agricultural and industrial enterprises and partly by working on their own or rented scraps of land, which provided a small part of the produce they needed to feed their families. This peasant stratum, which was extremely numerous in most capitalist countries, had a hard time. It was very much like the rural proletariat. Its resources were strained to the limit by ruthless exploitation. "...And they stand to gain enormously and immediately from Soviet government and the dictatorship of the proletariat..."<sup>2</sup>

Next came the third stratum—the small peasants who owned or rented small plots of land that just about provided for the needs of the family and the farm. This numerous stratum of the rural poor, harassed by various forms of oppression and dependence, was also interested in the victory of the proletarian revolution, which would immediately free it from the payment of rent and debts, give it the landed estates without its having to purchase them or pay compensation for them and provide immediate assistance for its farming from the proletarian state.

In singling out these three groups of the exploited masses of the countryside Lenin showed that because of their economic, social and political status the rural proletarians, semi-proletarians and small peasants linked up directly with the urban proletariat and fought under its banner. These groups, taken together, constituted in Russia, as in other capitalist countries, the majority of the rural population. This meant that the urban proletariat by organising and leading them ensured their ultimate victory both in the town and in the country.

This was the truth of the situation, Lenin pointed out, "a truth which has been fully proved by Marxist theory and fully corroborated by the experience of the proletarian revolution in Russia, namely, that although the three enumerated categories of the rural

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "First All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 484.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 154.

population—who are incredibly downtrodden, disunited, crushed, and doomed to semi-barbarous conditions of existence in all countries, even the most advanced—are economically, socially, and culturally interested in the victory of socialism, they are capable of giving resolute support to the revolutionary proletariat only *after* the latter has won political power, only *after* it has resolutely dealt with the big landowners and capitalists, and only *after* these downtrodden people see *in practice* that they have an organised leader and champion, strong and firm enough to assist and lead them and to show them the right path”.<sup>1</sup>

The experience of the October Socialist Revolution proved the correctness of Lenin’s analysis. All these three strata of the peasant population—the rural proletarians, the semi-proletarians and small peasants—were a reliable bulwark for the urban proletariat in carrying through the October Revolution. They provided solid backing for the Soviet Government in its efforts to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat and build socialism.

Along with the rural proletariat and the poor peasants there was yet another stratum of the working peasants—the middle peasants, who owned or rented plots of land which, though small, allowed them to accumulate by farming certain surpluses of produce that could be sold. In favourable conditions the middle peasants quite often employed labour. Under the capitalist system the middle peasant was an elusive figure. Either he rose into the kulak bracket or, as often happened, he slipped down into the army of the poor. This wobbling of the middle peasant towards the bourgeoisie was inevitable because of his private-ownership psychology, his desire to become his own boss. “The peasant’s title to property is the talisman by which capital held him hitherto under its spell, the pretext under which it set him against the industrial proletariat.”<sup>2</sup>

While maintaining an appearance of economic independence, the middle peasants experienced the full effect of the laws of capitalism and gradually became aware of the need to join up with the working class. This shift in their allegiance largely depended on the degree of unity achieved between the proletariat and the rural poor as an independent class force. Pointing out the need for the working peasants to ally themselves with the urban proletariat, Lenin had written long before the revolution: “When that alliance is established and strengthened, we shall easily expose all the deceit

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, “The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850”, in: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 122.

the bourgeoisie resorts to in order to attract the middle peasant.... We shall unswervingly march to victory and rapidly achieve *the complete emancipation of all working people*."<sup>1</sup>

At a certain stage in the revolution the Communist Party, knowing that the middle peasant was bound to vacillate, decided to neutralise him, that is to say, adopted a policy designed to overcome his vacillations, to draw him away from bourgeois influence. The policy of neutralisation meant putting the middle peasant into a position in which he would not support the bourgeoisie while at the same time ensuring that he would take an active part in the struggle on the side of the proletariat. In the conspectus of his pamphlet "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat" Lenin defined the policy of neutralising the middle peasants as follows: "'To head', 'to lead', 'to take with'...."<sup>2</sup> At the same time, by organising the forces of the proletariat and rallying the poor of the countryside around them, the Communist Party prepared a path by which the middle peasants could come over to the Soviets.

Now the kulaks. This stratum, generated by the small-commodity economy also formed a part of the peasantry but there was a high wall between it and the rest of the peasants. The kulaks were capitalist entrepreneurs, who lived on the capital accumulated by exploitation of the working people. According to Marx's description, they were vampires sucking blood from the heart and brains from the head of the working peasant. The kulaks were implacable enemies of the revolutionary proletariat, and, as Lenin pointed out, "the most brutal, callous and savage exploiters, who in the history of other countries have time and again restored the power of the landowners, tsars, priests and capitalists".<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the preparation and realisation of the socialist revolution, in the years of civil war and foreign intervention, and in the period of socialist construction the kulaks invariably acted as inveterate enemies of the proletariat and the working peasants. Understandably the Soviet Government took extremely resolute measures against them.

At the same time it should be remembered that the kulaks are a class that has deep roots in the socio-economic system of the small-commodity economy, which generates capitalist elements constantly and on a mass scale. The victorious proletariat cannot on

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "To the Rural Poor", *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 421.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Comrade Workers, Forward to the Last, Decisive Fight!", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 56.

any condition immediately expropriate this exploiting class. "We do not say of the kulaks as we do of the capitalist landowner that he must be deprived of all his property."<sup>1</sup> "We say that the resistance, the counter-revolutionary efforts of the rich peasants must be suppressed. That is not complete expropriation."<sup>2</sup>

The liquidation of the kulaks as a class and of what made them a class is one of the proletariat's basic tasks, but this task could not be carried out as soon as it had won power; it had to be dealt with later. In Russia the liquidation of the kulaks was postponed for a whole decade. This was due to the special conditions which Lenin summed up as the fact that the Russian revolution after the masterstroke of October 1917 had yet to pass through the stage of the bourgeois-democratic struggle of the peasantry as a whole against the landowners; and also the fact of the cultural backwardness and numerical weakness of Russia's urban proletariat; and finally, the huge distances and extremely bad communications.

Leninism teaches us that the elimination of the kulaks as a class is possible only when the material and social conditions pertain for creating a large-scale socialised economy in agriculture. In the Soviet Union the elimination of the kulaks as a class was carried out on the basis of overall collectivisation, which was launched only after the successes of socialist industry had provided the technological base for radical socialist reconstruction of agriculture.

*Lenin thus gave an all-round scientific definition of the social groups of the peasantry, correctly defined the policy of the working class towards these groups and consistently applied it at specific stages in the development of the socialist revolution.*

*In the first stage of the revolution, in the struggle against the monarchy, the landowners and medievalism, the Party's political line was to rally the whole peasantry around the working class and ensure its victory in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. This strategic Party slogan operated for twelve years and largely achieved its purpose in the period of the February Revolution of 1917, when the main strategic objective—the overthrow of the monarchy—was accomplished.*

*In the second stage of the revolution the Party's strategic slogan changed in accordance with the change in the balance of class*

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes, December 11, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eighth Congress of the R.C.P. (B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 205.

forces. Now the Party's political line was to rally the rural poor around the working class in the struggle against the bourgeoisie of town and country, to neutralise the middle peasants and ensure the victory of the socialist revolution. This slogan operated for about two years and had been fulfilled by the beginning of 1919. By this time the socialist revolution had, among other things, completed the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, eliminated the landowner class, crushed the anti-Soviet attacks of the rural bourgeoisie, organised the poor peasants as an independent class force and swung the middle peasants towards Soviet Power.

The Party's strategic slogans were proved correct by the whole course of the three Russian revolutions. "Things have turned out just as we said they would. The course taken by the revolution has confirmed the correctness of our reasoning. First, with the 'whole' of the peasants against the monarchy, against the landowners, against medievalism (and to that extent the revolution remains bourgeois, bourgeois-democratic). Then, with the poor peasants, with the semi-proletarians, with all the exploited, against capitalism, including the rural rich, the kulaks, the profiteers, and to that extent the revolution becomes a socialist one."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. THE PARTY MOVES ON FROM A POLICY OF NEUTRALISATION TO A POLICY OF FIRM ALLIANCE WITH THE MIDDLE PEASANTS

The Party's Second Programme, passed at the Eighth Congress in 1919, formulated the third slogan on the peasant question. This slogan defined the Party's triple task in the countryside as reliance on the poor, alliance with the middle peasants, and restriction and ousting of the kulaks. Under this slogan of Lenin's, which held good for ten years, the Party carried out a great socialist revolution in the countryside, put an end to the class stratification of the peasantry and guided the overwhelming majority of the country's population onto the socialist road. Because it was so well-timed, this third slogan on the peasant question proved to be of historical importance in strengthening the proletariat's revolutionary power, rallying the whole of the working peasantry under the leadership of the working class, reorganising agriculture on socialist lines and

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 300.



totally abolishing the most numerous exploiting class—the kulaks.

The party's three strategic slogans on the peasant question form an integrated chain of action to win over the mass of the working peasants to the side of the proletariat.

With the regrouping of the class forces in the countryside and the middle peasants' turn towards Soviet power the social base of the alliance between the working class and the mass of the working peasants became much broader. In the summer of 1918, with an eye to the class changes in the countryside, Lenin raised the question of reaching an agreement with the middle peasants. He had received signals from some localities indicating that the Party's policy in organising Poor Peasants' Committees had been distorted, so now he resolutely condemned the anti-middle peasant tendencies of a number of local functionaries. In a telegram of 17 August 1918, addressed to all gubernia Deputies' Soviets and food committees he pointed out: "Soviet power has never waged a struggle against the middle peasants. Soviet power has always set itself the aim of uniting the urban proletariat with the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat, and also with the working peasants of moderate means who do not exploit the working people. In its activities therefore Soviet power has sought and still seeks to satisfy both the needs of the middle stratum of the peasantry and those of the urban workers and rural poor."<sup>1</sup>

In the draft decree placed before the Council of People's Commissars on 23 September 1918 on imposing the tax in kind on rural owners Lenin recommended freeing the poor people of all taxes and placing "easy taxes" on the middle peasants. In view of Lenin's remarks, the Decree of 26 October 1918 was worded as follows. The Soviet Government, it said, seeks "the complete exemption of the poor from any tax burden by transferring the whole burden of taxation to the property-owning, well-to-do classes, so that the middle peasants in the rural areas are only moderately taxed while the rich, the kulaks have to bear the main cost of state levies...."<sup>2</sup>

Keeping a close watch on the practical realisation of the Party's policy in the countryside and particularly the middle peasants' swing towards the revolution, Lenin reached the conclusion that the Party's policy towards the middle peasants should be changed. In his article "The Valuable Admissions of Pitirim Sorokin", published in November 1918, he wrote: "Our task in the rural dis-

<sup>1</sup> *Lenin Miscellany XVIII*, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 154.

tricts is to destroy the landowner and smash the resistance of the exploiter and the kulak profiteer. For this purpose we can safely rely only on the semi-proletarians, the "poor peasants". But the middle peasant is not our enemy. He wavered, is wavering, and will continue to waver. The task of influencing the waverers is not identical with the task of overthrowing the exploiter and defeating the active enemy. The task at the present moment is to come to an agreement with the middle peasant—while not for a moment renouncing the struggle against the kulak and at the same time firmly relying solely on the poor peasant—for a turn in our direction on the part of the middle peasants is now inevitable....<sup>1</sup> This substantiation of the third strategic slogan on the peasant question was approved by the Eighth Party Congress. What were the reasons for the Party's adoption of a new policy on the peasant question?

First, the shift in policy was chiefly due to the whole class assessment of the available forces. The first year of the victorious October Socialist Revolution had brought the Soviet power striking successes. It had firmly established itself in both town and country. The main task of the revolution, the winning of state power by the proletariat, had been accomplished. The developments in the rural areas had thus got beyond the stage when everything had to be subordinated to the struggle for power. "When, after having overthrown the bourgeoisie and consolidated its own power, the proletariat started from various angles to create a new society, the question of the middle peasant came to the fore."<sup>2</sup>

In adopting the new political line on the middle peasants, the Communist Party proceeded from an assessment of all the objective and subjective factors which had brought this stratum to the fore in the economic development of the Soviet countryside. Thanks to the advances made possible by the October Socialist Revolution, the rural areas had become predominantly middle-peasant; the poorest strata of the peasantry had risen to the middle-peasant level. A process of levelling had taken place and the middle peasant had become the central figure in agriculture. Hence the logical conclusion was that to achieve an upswing in agriculture there must be orientation on the middle peasants. "If we want to raise the productivity of our peasant farming we must

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Valuable Admissions of Pitirim Sorokin", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 205.

reckon chiefly with the middle peasant. The Communist Party has had to shape its policy accordingly."<sup>1</sup>

Second, the Party also took into account the prospects of rural development without forgetting its main task—to attract the middle peasant on to the road of socialist development, to reorganise agriculture on socialist principles. Without the middle peasants' participation it would obviously be impossible to achieve the socialist transformation of Soviet agriculture. This was yet another factor necessitating the Party's move towards a new policy. The rural proletariat and the poor peasants were the organising force of the first collective associations. At first the middle peasant distrusted these associations. He doubted whether they would work and preferred to wait and see what advantages they offered him. "We have to give the peasant, who not only in our country but all over the world is a practical man and a realist, concrete examples to prove that the 'communia' is the best possible thing."<sup>2</sup>

Concrete proof of the advantages of the new socialist road in the countryside could be the equipping of large-scale collective farms with more modern machinery, the creation of a powerful material and technical base, capable of giving real economic and technical assistance to the working peasant. Lenin said that if Soviet power had then had 100,000 tractors with a good supply of petrol and experienced tractor drivers, the middle peasant would have undoubtedly supported collective farming. Given the right conditions, the middle peasant was bound to take the only correct path, the path of collective development because his economic position was pulling him in that direction. It was all a matter of time, of creating favourable conditions for the middle peasant to come over to the collective farms, to break away from his individual, private farming. The Party resolutely set about providing these conditions over a period of years.

And third, the Party's switch to a policy of alliance with the middle peasants was determined by the fact that in some localities, because of lack of skill in conducting the policy of neutralisation, the Party line on the middle peasant had quite often been distorted. Instead of attracting and winning him over to the Soviets, many local functionaries had used force. Time and again, Lenin

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Report on the Tax in Kind Delivered at a Meeting of Secretaries and Responsible Representatives of R.C.P.(B.) Cells of Moscow and Moscow Gubernia, April 9, 1921", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 211.

said, the blows aimed at the kulaks were landing on the middle peasant. These distortions had to be removed, there had to be a turn towards a policy of agreement and consolidation of a long-term alliance with the middle peasant. "*Coercion applied to the middle peasants would cause untold harm.... Here coercion would ruin the whole cause.*"<sup>1</sup> Lenin ruthlessly criticised the anti-middle peasant tendencies and regarded them as political adventurism that was doing enormous damage to the cause of socialism.

It was a very complex and difficult problem, he pointed out. In theory, the problem of the proletariat's attitude to the middle peasant as a working stratum was completely clear, but the theory was rather difficult to apply in practice because of the middle peasants' instability and vacillation. "We have to determine our attitude towards a class which has no definite and stable position. The proletariat in the mass is in favour of socialism, the bourgeoisie in the mass are opposed to socialism. It is easy to determine the relations between these two classes. But when we come up against people like the middle peasants we find that *they are a class that vacillates. The middle peasant is partly a property-owner and partly a working man.*"<sup>2</sup>

The opponents of Lenin's policy, the Trotskyites, completely ignored these social peculiarities of the middle peasant, treated him as a reactionary force, hostile to the proletariat, and tried to take the same measures against him as they did against the kulaks. The Communist Party took firm measures to stop the Trotskyites' Leftist policy. In doing so, it was guided by Lenin's thesis that the middle peasant, because of his socio-economic position, stood at the crossroads between capitalism and socialism, and that whether or not he accepted socialism depended primarily on the Party's taking a correct policy in the countryside.

The middle peasants were a stratum of society whose allegiance was sought by both the working class and the bourgeoisie. This meant that the Communist Party had to fight persistently for the middle peasants, that it had to be able to come to terms with them, and persuade and educate them in such a way that they could free themselves from their property-owning habits and firmly take the path of the working class. The middle peasants' swing towards Soviet power signified a major victory for the policy of the Communist Party, which showed in practice that the middle peasant was quite capable of becoming an active force in

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, pp. 210, 211.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 206.

the struggle for the socialist reorganisation of society. Lenin's prediction that freeing the middle peasant from bourgeois influence would depend on the organisation and unity of the rural proletariat and the poor peasants as an independent political force was completely vindicated.

The correct definition of the third strategic slogan on the peasant question and its timely realisation was of tremendous historical importance in consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat. This line was written down in the programme passed by the Eighth Party Congress. "With regard to the middle peasants, the policy of the R.C.P. is to draw them into the work of socialist construction gradually and systematically. The Party sets itself the task of separating them from the kulaks, of winning them to the side of the working class by carefully attending to their needs, by combating their backwardness with ideological weapons and not with measures of suppression, and by striving in all cases where their vital interests are concerned to come to practical agreement with them, making concessions to them in determining the methods of carrying out socialist reforms."<sup>1</sup>

A resolution of the Eighth Congress clearly formulated Lenin's principles of class policy towards all sections of the peasant population. The new slogan on the peasant question expressed the dialectical unity of the party's efforts to strengthen and expand the political base of the alliance between the working class and the mass of working peasants and to prepare for the final elimination of the capitalist elements in the national economic system. Having proclaimed its third strategic slogan on the peasant question, the Communist Party set about reinforcing it by organisational and material means. The first thing was to get the work of the local Party and government organs rapidly reorganised to suit the new conditions, so that the middle peasant would be made tangibly aware of the Party's new policy in the countryside and become involved in the work of socialist construction.

In the period under review we can delineate three stages of development of the class struggle in the countryside, during which the rural proletariat and the poor peasants defended their class interests by combining their forces in various political and social organisations.

The first stage (from the end of 1917 to the summer of 1918) covers the period of the proclamation of the first agrarian laws,

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Draft Programme of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 140.

and the setting up of the Soviets and land committees. At this stage the peasantry acted en masse to defeat the common enemy, the landowners, to destroy landed proprietorship and carry the bourgeois-democratic revolution through to its logical conclusion. The class antagonisms within the peasantry itself had not yet matured and were not yet apparent. However, in the course of the struggle against the landowners a rift that was bound to lead to open conflict began to appear. The Communist Party used the law on the socialisation of the land so that it gradually became "the means that enabled us to unite the poor peasants around us and turn them against the kulaks".<sup>1</sup>

The second stage covers the period of the setting up and functioning of the Poor Peasants' Committees (June to November 1918). This was one of the most vivid pages in the history of the October Revolution in the countryside. The rural proletariat and the poor peasants with the support of the industrial workers struck the first massive blow against the counter-revolutionary kulaks and showed themselves to be a reliable bulwark of Soviet power, a champion of communist policy in the countryside. "But from the moment the Poor Peasants' Committees began to be organised our revolution became a proletarian revolution."<sup>2</sup>

The third stage began at the end of 1918, when Lenin insisted on switching immediately from neutralisation to a firm alliance between the working class and the middle peasants. Lenin's third slogan on the peasant question endorsed by the Eighth Party Congress, heralded a new stage in the development of the revolution designed to win over the mass of the working peasants to the cause of socialist construction and to be concluded by the victory of socialism in the land of Soviets.

## 5. THE CIVIL WAR AND THE PARTY'S AGRARIAN POLICY IN THE PERIOD OF WAR COMMUNISM

When it embarked on the socialist revolution, the Communist Party foresaw that the capitalists and the landowners would not peacefully yield power, that a severe and prolonged struggle was

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Moscow Party Workers' Meeting, November 27, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 157.

inevitable. Before the working people could begin to appreciate the benefits of the great changes that were taking place, a civil war broke out that turned the young Soviet Republic into a besieged fortress. This was a war imposed by the internal counter-revolution and the reactionary forces of the imperialist countries that supported it.

The Civil War made enormous demands on the country's human and material resources. It put under further strain an economy which had already been crippled by the First World War. The labour of millions of people in town and country was taken out of production by recruitment for the regular Red Army units and partisan detachments. The strength of the Red Army, which in 1918 had stood at one million men, rose to three million in 1919 and to 5.3 million in 1920. The Whiteguard armies were also built up by mobilisation, and by 1920 reached the two million mark. It is estimated that about ten million people were involved in various forms of mobilisation.

We must also take into consideration the specific features of the Civil War, in which the armies were extremely mobile. Retreats were followed by offensives, or vice versa, resulting in the devastation of huge areas. This was particularly true of the areas occupied by the White Guards and the intervention forces, where the peasant farms were often plundered and destroyed. The Civil War had a devastating effect on all aspects of peasant life.

The prolonged civil conflict upset the normal course of agrarian reform and demanded an economic and class policy adapted to meet wartime needs, to defeat the combined forces of the internal and external counter-revolution. The Party decided that the only possible solution in the circumstances was to introduce a policy of *War Communism*. The Soviet Republic, said Lenin, was besieged on all sides, so "we could not afford to hesitate in introducing War Communism, or daring to go to the most desperate extremes: to save the workers' and peasants' rule we had to suffer an existence of semi-starvation and worse than semi-starvation, but to hold on at all costs, in spite of unprecedented ruin and the absence of economic intercourse".<sup>1</sup>

War Communism was not based on economic theory. "It was the war and the ruin that forced us into the War Communism. It was not, and could not be, a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It was a makeshift."<sup>2</sup> Rejecting

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Tax in Kind", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 343.

the bourgeois assertions that the proletarian revolution was purely destructive and incapable of building anything, Lenin said: "In every socialist revolution, however – and consequently in the socialist revolution in Russia which we began on October 25, 1917 – the principal task of the proletariat, and of the poor peasants ... it leads, is the positive or constructive work of setting up an extremely intricate and delicate system of new organisational relationships extending to the planned production and distribution of the goods required for the existence of tens of millions of people."<sup>1</sup>

This was where the young Soviet Republic was to begin its creative activities. Lenin's plan of economic development was highly creative, but its execution was delayed by the Civil War and foreign intervention. All the energies of the Party and the working people were concentrated on fighting the counter-revolution. The Soviet Government introduced War Communism and put through the corresponding political and economic measures. It took the whole of industry under its centralised control and put it at the service of national defence; it introduced a monopoly on trade in grain and banned private trade; it registered all the food resources in agriculture; it introduced food requisitioning and mutual responsibility of the whole village commune for its performance; it introduced universal labour duties and centralised the administration of all branches of the economy.

During the period of War Communism the working class and the peasants built their relations on mutual concessions and mutual agreements for the sake of defending the great gains of the October Revolution. This was a military and political alliance of the workers and peasants against the landowners and capitalists. But this alliance could not have lasted even a few weeks without an economic basis. From the workers' government the peasant received land and protection from the landowners and the kulaks, while from the peasants the workers received enough food to keep them going until large-scale industry was restored.

In this period the policy of requisitioning food surpluses was central to the whole system of political and economic co-operation between the two classes of working people, peasants and industrial workers. As Lenin explained, food requisitioning was by no means the ideal. It was a matter of bitter necessity. "...The confiscation of surpluses from the peasants was a measure with which we were saddled by the imperative conditions of war-time, but which no

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 241.



longer applies to anything like the peace-time conditions of the peasants' economy."<sup>1</sup> And further: "...We could hold out—in a besieged fortress—only through the surplus-grain appropriation system, that is, by taking from the peasant whatever surplus produce was available, and sometimes even a part of his necessities, in order to keep the army in fighting trim and to prevent industry from going to pieces altogether."<sup>2</sup>

The fierce, exhausting war, accompanied by constant Socialist-Revolutionary and kulak revolts and a sharp aggravation of the class struggle in the countryside, left its mark on the whole course of agrarian reform. Amidst the catastrophic decline of agriculture and the terrible impoverishment of the countryside ways had to be found of giving effective help to the poor peasants and improving food supplies for the Red Army. Circumstances forced the Party to take fresh steps towards realising both its food and its agrarian policy.

*The first forced measure was to make a series of changes in the agrarian policy.* In view of the new situation the Party took the line of speeding up the socialisation of agriculture. The production amalgamation of the peasant farms in agricultural collectives and the organisation of a broad network of state-run Soviet farms was pushed ahead. This line was legalised in the decision of the All-Russia CEC of 14 February 1919, the *Decision on Socialist Land-Use Surveying and Measures for Transition to Socialist Agriculture*. The Decision stated: "...There must be a transition from individual forms of land use to collective forms. The large-scale Soviet farms, the communes, the collective working of the land and other forms of collective land use are the best means of achieving this aim.... Land-use surveying should be based on the need to create an integrated economy supplying the Soviet Republic with the greatest possible amount of goods at the least possible expenditure of the people's labour. Accordingly, land-use surveying shall embrace all measures of a technological nature designed to gradually socialise land use."<sup>3</sup>

This was a quite new line compared with the one that had been proclaimed in the first land decrees issued by the Soviet Government. It was made particularly explicit in the second half of the

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Report on the Tax in Kind Delivered at a Meeting of Secretaries and Responsible Representatives of R.C.P.(B.) Cells of Moscow and Moscow Gubernia, April 9, 1921", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> *The Economic Policy of the USSR*, Vol. I, p. 335 (in Russian).

decision. "The whole fund of agricultural land shall be surveyed.... This fund of land shall be used, first, to meet the needs of the Soviet farms and communes, second, to meet the needs of the labour artels and associations and social cultivation of the land, third, for obtaining the means of livelihood for the individual land users."<sup>1</sup>

This meant that the socialised farms were given priority. The decision specifically stated that "all forms of individual land use must be regarded as transient and obsolescent".<sup>2</sup> Even in the case of the socialised farms the first priority was given to the highest form of association—the agricultural communes as bulwarks for creating a large-scale socialist agriculture.

*The second forced measure taken by the Soviet Government was to nationalise all forms of co-operation.* At the end of 1918 Lenin returned once again to the idea of organising consumer communes. In December 1918 he set the co-operators the task of co-ordinating their work with the organs of Soviet power, abandoning the mistaken idea of "independence", and merging the so-called general citizens' and workers' consumer co-operatives into an integrated organisation under the leadership of the proletariat. This attitude to the problem was due to two factors: first, the critical conditions of the Civil War and, second, the anti-Soviet activities of the leaders of bourgeois co-operatives, which had turned them into a refuge for the counter-revolutionary forces. The co-operators of Siberia, the Volga Area, and various districts of the South and North were actively helping the White generals Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich in the struggle against Soviet power. They joined the various Whiteguard governments and actively collaborated with the American, British and French intervention forces. Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary co-operators transferred huge amounts of capital and material values abroad and left the co-operatives ruined and exhausted.

All the old forms of co-operation needed renovating and the co-operatives had to be purged of the hostile elements and brought under state control. On 16 March 1919 the Soviet Government passed the Decree On Consumer Communes. This decree extended co-operation to the whole population on a compulsory basis. "The Consumer Commune shall embrace the whole population of the given locality. It is the duty of every citizen to

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<sup>1</sup> *The Economic Policy of the USSR*, Vol. I, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 335.

become a member of the Commune and get himself registered at one of its distribution points.”<sup>1</sup>

All the consumer co-operatives in a given town or rural area were merged into one distributing agency, the consumer commune for the area. These communes were, in their turn, centralised through the uyezds and gubernias under the Tsentrosoyuz—Central Union. All supply and distribution of food was transferred to the consumer communes and the co-operatives thus formed the country’s distribution network, which operated on the basis of a state plan of distribution. But to make sure that all food policy was kept in state hands, the co-operative system was placed under the control of the People’s Commissariat for Food, where a special board was set up—the Glavkoop (Central Co-operative Board) to effect control. In his assessment of the Soviet Government’s measures to organise the co-operatives Lenin wrote: “The question of co-operatives and consumer communes that was recently discussed by the Council of People’s Commissars ... brings up, as the most important task, the transitional measures from bourgeois co-operation to communist consumer and production amalgamation of the whole population.”<sup>2</sup>

[The main features] of the Soviet Government’s economic policy in the period of War Communism were centralisation of administration and socialisation of all branches of the national economy. This also applied to the co-operative system, which was likewise centralised and socialised. On 27 January 1920 a decree of the Council of People’s Commissars abolished all branch and special co-operative centres, except the Tsentrosoyuz. All agricultural and other co-operatives became sections of the Tsentrosoyuz. Having thus lost most of this independent status, the co-operatives became distribution agencies that were subsidiary and subordinated to the People’s Commissariat for Food. The complete subordination of the co-operatives culminated in their being put on an estimate system of financing under the state budget by a decision of the government passed on 13 December 1920. The previous compromise with the old bourgeois co-operatives was discarded and Soviet Russia was temporarily transformed into a kind of “consumer commune”.

And finally, the third step, the Soviet Government took control of all economic activities of the peasant farms and proclaimed the slogan of state regulation of the republic’s agriculture. The first

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>2</sup> *Lenin Miscellany XVIII*, p. 290.

attempts were made to plan sowing areas and determine the various amounts of crops that were to be grown throughout the republic. Measures were taken to provide every peasant farm with a compulsory sowing plan stating exactly how much was to be sown of certain crops. In accordance with these plans every farm was given a firm target for delivery of grain to the state. The line on centralised regulation of the economic activities of peasant producers was legalised by the decision of the Eighth Congress of Soviets, held in December 1920. Taken as a whole, this decision was of immense importance. The measures of state coercion which had been necessary to implement the policy of War Communism were immediately abolished when the New Economic Policy was adopted.

The system of measures taken under War Communism was based neither on theory nor on precedent. Such a system had never been applied in any country. And it is by no means obligatory for any other country that may be making the transition from capitalism to socialism in the future. *This was a specific policy, made necessary and logical by specific historical conditions.* "...Until now we have been living in the conditions of a savage war that imposed an unprecedented burden on us and left us no choice but to take war-time measures in the economic sphere as well. It was a miracle that the ruined country withstood this war, yet the miracle did not come from heaven, but grew out of the economic interests of the working class and the peasantry...."<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to the policy of War Communism the young Soviet Republic not only survived; it defeated the combined forces of internal and external counter-revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, pp. 219-20.

## CHAPTER XIII

# THE GREAT OCTOBER SOCIALIST REVOLUTION AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW SOCIALIST FORMS OF ECONOMY IN AGRICULTURE

## 1. HISTORICAL PRE-CONDITIONS FOR A SOCIALISED ECONOMY IN AGRICULTURE

The problem of the socialist transformation of agriculture and drawing the working peasants into the building of socialism occupies a prominent place in the agrarian theory of Marxism-Leninism. For the first time in the history of social thought Marx and Engels scientifically proved the need for large-scale socialist agriculture and showed that the only way of saving the small and middle peasant from poverty and exploitation by landowners and capitalists was large-scale socialisation of agriculture. The future will decide, Marx wrote, that "the land can but be owned by the nation itself. To give up the soil to the hands of associated rural labourers would be to surrender society to one exclusive class of producers.... To live on other people's labour will become a thing of the past. There will be no longer any government or state power, distinct from society itself!"<sup>1</sup>

The first step towards accomplishing this great task was to overthrow the bourgeoisie, take away its right of private ownership of the instruments and means of production, and set up a government of workers and peasants. Foreseeing the inevitable collapse of capitalism and the establishment of the political rule of the working class, the creators of the scientific theory of communism made some brilliant suppositions about the ways in which the socialist transformation of agriculture would take place and how the working peasants would be drawn into the proletariat's general struggle for socialism. When the proletariat commands state power, Marx wrote, it "must, as a government, take measures that will result in a direct improvement of the peasants' con-

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, "The Nationalisation of the Land", in: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1917, p. 290.

dition, and that will consequently bring him over to the side of the revolution; measures which embryonically facilitate the transition from private ownership of the land to collective ownership, so that the peasant himself comes round to this by an economic path...."<sup>1</sup>

The Marxist classics, while stressing the economic need for the socialist reorganisation of agriculture, warned against any haste in dealing with this problem and against the dangers of applying coercion to the working peasant. They firmly rejected the idea of expropriation of the small and middle peasant producers as reactionary and disastrous for socialist construction. Engels said, "When we are in possession of state power we shall not even think of forcibly expropriating the small peasants (regardless of whether with or without compensation), as we shall have to do in the case of the big landowners. Our task relative to the small peasant consists, in the first place, in effecting a transition of his private enterprise and private possession to co-operative ones, not forcibly but by dint of example and the proffer of social assistance for this purpose."<sup>2</sup>

In order to involve the working peasants in a large-scale socialist agriculture it was necessary to find simple and understandable forms of association that would help the peasant to see and appreciate the advantages of large-scale socialised farming. The classical exponents of Marxism believed that only co-operatives could perform this role. This was the organisational and economic form of association which with all-round material, organisational and technical assistance from the proletarian state would prepare the transition of the peasant masses to amalgamated labour, to the large-scale collective economy. Engels wrote that "in passing on to the complete communist economy we shall have to make wide use of co-operative production as an intermediate link—Marx and I have never doubted this."<sup>3</sup>

The brilliant ideas of the founders of scientific communism were distorted and vulgarised by the "theoreticians" of the Second International, the Russian Mensheviks, Trotskyites, Bukharinites, and other revisionists.

Some of them claimed that the proletariat should not take power until capitalism had ruined millions of small and middle peasants, turned them into wage-labourers and concentrated the

<sup>1</sup> Marx, Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 18, Berlin, 1969, S. 633.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels, "The Peasant Question in France and Germany", in: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1976, p. 470.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 36, Berlin, 1967, S. 426.

means of production in agriculture. Only then could the question of the proletariat's taking power and socialising the peasants' means of production that had already been concentrated by capitalism, be solved. Karl Kautsky, for example, in his book *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, which appeared in 1918, accused the Bolshevik Party and the Russian proletariat of breaking this "rule" by taking power in a country with a predominantly small-peasant population that had not had time to become agricultural labourers.

Other pseudo-Marxists believed that if the proletariat took power it should immediately expropriate the small and middle producers and turn them into wage-labourers of state agricultural enterprises. Trotsky's and Zinoviev's supporters tried to steer the Soviet Republic onto this path. They demanded ruthless pressure on the peasantry, the imposition of unbearable taxes and harsh economic repressive measures that would be equivalent to outright expropriation.

But long before this, the great harm inherent in such conceptions had been pointed out by Engels, who had taken a completely opposite stand. "The greater the number of peasants whom we can save from being actually hurled down into the proletariat, whom we can win to our side while they are still peasants, the more quickly and easily the social transformation will be accomplished. It will serve us nought to wait with this transformation until capitalist production has developed everywhere to its utmost consequences, until the last small craftsman and the last small peasant have fallen victim to capitalist large-scale production. The material sacrifice to be made for this purpose in the interest of the peasants and to be defrayed out of public funds can, from the point of view of capitalist economy, be viewed only as money thrown away, but it is nevertheless an excellent investment because it will effect a perhaps tenfold saving in the cost of the social reorganisation in general. In this sense we can, therefore, afford to deal very liberally with the peasants."<sup>1</sup>

The policy of Bukharin and his supporters was also extremely harmful. They maintained that bringing the peasants together in production co-operatives was not socialism at all and proposed restricting rural co-operation to the framework of purchasing, sales and supply. From the objective viewpoint they were helping

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Engels, "The Peasant Question in France and Germany", in: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 3, pp. 471-72.

to give capitalist development greater scope in the countryside, which would inevitably ruin the small peasant producers.

These revisionist lines on the agrarian question actually amounted to the abandonment of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist revolution, abandonment of the idea of the revolutionary role of the mass of the working peasants. It was no accident that opportunists of all kinds attempted to revise the Marxist proposition that under capitalism the small-peasant economy must inevitably be ruined and ousted by large-scale economy. In opposition to revolutionary Marxism they advocated bourgeois reformist theories of the eternal and immutable "natural laws of development of agriculture", of the "spontaneity", "equilibrium" and "stability" of the small-peasant economy. All the weapons in the revisionists' armoury on the agrarian question were aimed at proving it was impossible to carry out the socialist transformation of the countryside and bring the mass of working peasants into socialist construction.

Lenin shattered these reactionary ideas, which were calculated to sever the working peasants off from the working class, to weaken them and consolidate the position of the bourgeoisie. Taking agrarian relations in Russia as an example, he showed that the peasant masses' transition to the socialist road had been prepared by a whole historical period of the maturing of objective factors and social forces that had deeply undermined the old, private-property forms of farming. From their own practical experience the peasants had realised that these old forms of landownership, based on profound social antagonisms, had led to a grave crisis in the agricultural economy and brought the peasant masses to the brink of ruin. It was no accident that during the 1905 Revolution the great majority of Russia's peasants had come out in favour of nationalisation of all land.

*The demand made by the mass of working peasants for abolition of private property in land and nationalisation of all land was simultaneously an objective expression of their desire to build a new life in the countryside.* Even before the victory of the October Revolution the working peasant had expressed his readiness to destroy not only the big estates but also the large kulak farms, which had oppressed him for many decades. As for the small-commodity economy, though it did not save the peasant from the danger of bankruptcy, he clung to it out of habit, tradition and ignorance.

For these reasons the most advanced and mature section of the working peasants became more and more clearly aware that they could not go on living in the old way, that "the waste of human



toil and effort associated with individual small-scale peasant farming cannot continue. The productivity of labour would be doubled or trebled, there would be a double or triple saving of human labour in agriculture and human activity in general if a transition were made from this scattered small-scale farming to collective farming."<sup>1</sup>

The most advanced section of the working peasantry had, in fact, been able under the influence of the working class to rise to this degree of understanding even before the October Revolution. As soon as the February Revolution took place, the peasants started trying to set up socialised farms, and the Bolshevik Party was the only party that supported even then this bold initiative of the working peasants.

Evidence of the maturing of the objective conditions for fundamental changes in agricultural production was also provided by the development of the agrarian movement in Russia into a general peasant war, which broke out on the eve of the October Socialist Revolution and accelerated its victory. The terrible economic and cultural lag, the ruin and poverty irresistibly drove the working peasants towards a fundamental revolutionary break-up and radical transformation of the old land relations in Russia. Even in the first years after the October Revolution various kinds of socialised farms sprang up all over the Soviet Republic. These were the first shoots of socialism in the countryside which were later to grow into the most progressive socio-economic system the world had yet seen. The October Revolution was only the beginning, the essential precondition for the far-reaching socialist revolution that was shortly to come about in the countryside and be crowned by the complete victory of the collective-farm system.

After the proletariat had won state power this task became one of the Party's most urgent tasks in the general scheme of socialist construction. Pointing out the need for a socialised economy in agriculture, Lenin stressed that the socialist transformation of agriculture and bringing the working peasants into the construction of socialism were one of the most difficult and complex processes, because "a revolution of this kind, the transition from small individual peasant farms to collective farming, will take some time and can certainly not be accomplished at one stroke."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes, December 11, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, Moscow, 1965, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 341.

The complexity of this task lay in the fact that the Party had to tackle the agrarian aspect of the socialist revolution with a peasant population that, besides being extremely numerous, was economically and politically scattered and culturally backward. Despite the fact that the peasants, as allies of the working class, had played an enormous part in the three Russian revolutions, they had not passed through the school of class struggle or had the political training that the working class had acquired. Even after the victory of the socialist revolution, the peasantry remained the most numerous class of petty proprietors and was naturally unable, in the mass, to immediately take the path of fundamental socialist change in agriculture.

And the October Revolution itself could not at once pose and solve the problem of bringing the peasant masses over to large-scale socialist farming. "We fully realise that such tremendous changes in the lives of tens of millions of people as the transition from small individual peasant farming to collective farming, affecting as they do the most deep-going roots of the peasants' way of life and their mores, can only be accomplished by long effort, and only when necessity compels people to reshape their lives."<sup>1</sup>

Because this task was so complex the Communist Party had to take roundabout ways and adapt its methods of directing economic construction and mass organisational work in the countryside. The proletariat sometimes made concessions to the middle peasants in order to consolidate the alliance between the working class and the mass of the working peasantry, to lay the economic foundation of socialism and build socialist society. The only road that could lead the village towards socialism was that of the collective and state farms, the transition from the small peasant economy to a large-scale collective economy based on advanced technology and science. But the Party could not go ahead with a big drive for collective and state farms because it lacked the necessary material and technological means and the peasantry itself was not prepared for such far-reaching changes. "...Two factors are necessary for collective labour to replace parcelled labour, the source of private appropriation, in agriculture as such, the economic need for such a change and the requisite material conditions for its accomplishment."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes, December 11, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "First Draft of the Reply to V. I. Zasulich's Letter", in: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 3, p. 158.

At this point the question arises as to whether the preconditions for the transition to a socialist economy and collective labour in agriculture existed after the October Revolution.

The economic need for a large-scale socialised economy in agriculture was even then perfectly obvious. It was confirmed if by nothing else by the fact that the agrarian revolution that had begun on the eve of the October Revolution and that coincided with the socialist revolution provided the best proof of the imminent crisis in the old production relations of agriculture and the desire of the broad mass of the working people for a revolutionary solution of this crisis by the abolition of private ownership of land and nationalisation of all land. The urge of the peasant masses to live, farm and manage their affairs in a new way, without landowners, kulaks or capitalists was the main impulse that prompted them to embark on the revolutionary destruction of the old unbearable conditions of their existence.

As for the second precondition, that is to say, the material and technological resources for a mass (and one must stress the word "mass") transition of the working peasantry to a large-scale collective economy, the Soviet state did not at this early stage have such resources at its disposal. On coming to power the Bolsheviks inherited a technologically backward and ruined country with a low industrial potential, an almost totally illiterate population and a medieval level of agricultural development. Naturally, on such an impoverished material and technological base it was difficult to carry out a socialist transformation of agriculture and no less difficult to convince the peasantry of the need for such a transformation.

*It took 10 or 15 years of intense economic, organisational and educational work by the working class and the Communist Party to consolidate the socialist state, to create the necessary material conditions for industrialising the country and reforming agriculture on socialist lines. The peasantry had to be helped to understand the national and their own need to continue the socialist revolution in the countryside, to destroy the age-old private-property peasant habits, to do away with the small-commodity economy and create a new socio-economic system in the rural areas. The revolution was marching firmly and irresistibly towards this. The agrarian policy of the Party and the Soviet Government was designed to achieve the great goal.*

## 2. THE STATE FARMS AS STRONGPOINTS OF SOCIALIST AGRICULTURE

Lenin's plan of fundamental agrarian reform gave priority to the organisation of state farms as strongpoints for the development of socialist agriculture. This was dictated by profound factors of socio-economic development. In Russia capitalism had not yet had time to transform agriculture in its own way with the result that there were two completely different structures in the national economy.

In industry capitalism had created all the necessary technological preconditions for the transition to socialism. It had socialised labour, and concentrated and centralised production; it had created huge industrial enterprises and improved them technologically, raising labour productivity and the level of economic organisation. In other words, the material and technical base for large-scale socialist production was already made. Here the task of the socialist revolution was to sweep away the old relations of exploitation, to deprive the capitalists of economic power and place the administration of industrial production in the hands of its real masters—the working class.

In agriculture the situation was quite different. The socialist revolution was confronted with a different way of life and more complex tasks. One must remember that in this sphere the old system had not prepared the technological foundations for socialism and not created the preconditions for building it. So here socialism itself had to create its own material and technological base and on this newly created base lay the road to socialist agriculture. This first foundation was provided by the state farms, which were to perform this historic task.

It should be noted that what has been said relates primarily to the lagging, underdeveloped agrarian countries, where capitalism has not yet transformed agriculture in its own likeness. As for countries with a developed capitalist agriculture, capitalism has there created a material and technical base that allows them as soon as the proletarian revolution is victorious to develop a socialist economy in agriculture. This was foreseen by Engels. Not long before his death he wrote: "The big estates thus restored to the community are to be turned over by us to the rural workers who are already cultivating them and are to be organised into co-operatives. They are to be assigned to them for their use and benefit under the control of the community. Nothing can as yet be stated

as to the terms of their tenure. At any rate the transformation of the capitalist enterprise into a socialist enterprise is here fully prepared for and can be carried into execution overnight, precisely as in Mr. Krupp's or Mr. von Stumm's factory."<sup>1</sup>

Surely, in the agriculture of pre-revolutionary Russia there were some large-scale highly productive enterprises run on capitalist lines and providing a technological base for large-scale socialist farming? Yes, but they were very few in number. So there was no possibility of applying measures in agriculture analogous to those that had been adopted in industry. Admittedly, Russia did have many large estates and these were used for organising socialised farming but, as we have said, most of them had been run on medieval, feudal lines. Instead of developing production the owners had preferred to lease the land to the peasant on predatory terms.

It must also be remembered that the state farms were being organised in the context of a developing agrarian revolution, which was focussed on such urgent tasks as the destruction of feudal relations in the countryside and satisfaction of the peasants' demands for land. No wonder, then, that in many cases the landed estates were seized by the peasants and shared out amongst them. Far from preventing this, the Soviet Government did everything to encourage the peasants' struggle against landed proprietorship because this was the main obstacle to development of the productive forces. At the same time the most essential measures were taken to maintain the big capitalist farms intact and turn them into strongpoints of socialist agriculture. So when we speak of the first state farms we must bear in mind above all that the material foundations for their organisation were by no means uniform.

The Soviet state farms, set up on the basis of the capitalist-type enterprises, were for those days real large-scale model enterprises. Such enterprises had plenty of buildings and equipment. The workers who were employed there had acquired various skills and were united in one place in more or less large groups in the process of socialised labour. So the principles of management in such state farms were generally similar to the principles of management at industrial enterprises.

The state farms set up on the basis of the landowners' estates did not, as a rule, have such conditions. In many of them the land, implements and work animals had already been shared out among the peasants, the buildings were in a state of decay and

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

there was no labour available. In such cases the state farms had to start from scratch. Such enterprises differed little from the communes or artels.

The organisation of the first state farms got under way at the beginning of 1918, that is, it coincided with the abolition of the big estates. In fact these farms were set up mainly on the basis of the estates and then began to develop on other expropriated land. It must be admitted that the delays in making the big capitalist enterprises into state farms had negative consequences. Some highly organised enterprises were shared out or allowed to decay.

In the first year of the revolution the organisation of state farms went ahead spontaneously, on the initiative of the local functionaries, without sufficient guidance and intervention from the centre. It should be remembered that in the years of war and revolution the rural level of development had changed considerably; the countryside had become more responsive to various kinds of innovation. Large numbers of ex-servicemen who had seen various countries were now returning to the villages. Workers who had been obliged to leave the factories because of the curtailment of production or demobilisation of industry also came to the country. The urge to build up a new life there was particularly strong and showed itself mainly in the creation of large-scale socialised enterprises, state farms.

By the end of 1918 a total of 3,101 state farms had been set up. They were most numerous in areas where there had previously been many privately-owned estates. On the average each state farm had more than 500 dessiatines of land, which for those days was a fairly large-scale socialised enterprise. From 1919 state farm organisation began to improve and was better planned thanks to various measures carried out by the Party and the Soviet Government.

The actual purpose of each form of socialised enterprise in agriculture was closely defined, as were its further path of development and forms of organisational and economic management. Here a tremendous part was played by the Decision on Socialist Land-Use Surveying, which for the first time clearly defined the role of the state farms. These state farms, stated the decision, were to be organised for the purpose of (a) achieving the greatest possible increase in the amount of products by raising the productivity of agriculture and expanding sowing areas (b) creating conditions for the complete transition to communist agriculture and (c) setting up and developing centres for spreading knowledge of scientific farming.

These three points sum up Lenin's policy in the sphere of state farm organisation. Priority was given to the task of boosting the productivity of agriculture in order to satisfy the needs of the working people. Only the revolutionary proletariat—the most progressive class in contemporary society—could set such a noble aim. For the young Soviet Republic, surrounded on all sides by war and the economic blockade, the food question was crucial. Under such conditions the state farms had to be the source from which the Soviet Government could draw most of the food needed to supply the army and the urban population.

But matters did not stop there. The state farms were subsequently to become, and did become, in the hands of the state, powerful levers for reorganising the whole of agriculture on socialist lines. This historic role of the state farms was particularly stressed in the second Party Programme, where it was written in Lenin's own hand that an important measure for organising large-scale socialist agriculture was "the organisation of state farms (i. e., large socialist farms)...".<sup>1</sup> The state farms were charged with important duties for spreading advanced farming practices, methods of organising labour and providing models of first-class socialised management. These farms, the decision stated were to provide, depending on the facilities of each farm, model fields, stations for renting out machines and implements, stud farms, instruction courses, exhibitions, agricultural schools, libraries, museums, theatres and other cultural and educational establishments.

This meant that the state farms were to become vehicles of communist policy among the working peasants, centres of cultural and agro-technical assistance for the rural population. The advantages of the large-scale socialised farms had to be demonstrated to the peasants in practice. They had to be convinced by example that the state farms were a completely different type of institution, whose aim was to help them build a new life in the countryside.

At first the idea was to guide all the country's state farms from the centre and put them in the charge of the People's Commissariat for Agriculture. But this plan had to be changed owing to circumstances. On 15 February 1919 Lenin signed the Decree on Organisation of State Farms by the Institutions and Associations of the Industrial Proletariat, which gave the urban Soviets, the

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Draft Programme of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, Moscow, 1974, p. 139.

trade unions and state enterprises the right to acquire from the People's Commissariat for Agriculture plots of unused land in order to organise state farms for productive purposes. This decree defined the management of the state farms.

After the Eighth Congress of the RCP(B) state farms became so widespread that by the end of 1921 most of the expropriated land had been socialised. By the end of 1921 the state farms had at their disposal 3,918,000 dessiatines of good arable land. Many of them particularly those that had been set up on the basis of capitalist-type private estates, were becoming much better organised and beginning to look like well-established enterprises. According to the figures published by the People's Commissariat for Agriculture for July 1920, 3,076 state farms had 875,011 dessiatines of ploughland, 422,515 dessiatines of hay fields and pastures, 28,721 dessiatines of vegetable gardens and orchards, and 36,038 work horses and oxen. Their sowing area, which in 1919 had totalled 133,000 dessiatines, had by 1920 increased to 286,538 dessiatines. The number of people permanently employed on state farms was now 75,662.

Of course, in the general pattern of agriculture these figures were not very striking, but the first steps in developing the new type of farm had been taken. Incredible difficulties stood in the way of the organisers of the first state farms. They were always short of implements, labour, food and specialists. For the average state farm of 500 dessiatines there were usually only 24 hands, that is to say, less than one farm hand per 20 dessiatines. The average number of horses per state farm was 9, that is, one horse per 40 dessiatines of ploughland. Under such conditions there could be no question of cultivating all the available land.

Despite these difficulties, however, the state farms played an enormous role not only in providing food supplies but also in propagandising the advantages of large-scale socialised farming. The ideas of state farm organisation penetrated to the farthest corners of Soviet Russia.

*It was no longer in doubt that this new form of socialist farming had put down deep roots from which young growth was springing up all over the vast expanses of Russia. It was the state farms that were destined to take the lead in the socialist reorganisation of the country's agriculture. The state farms were to become and subsequently did become not only big suppliers of grain, but also propagandists of communist policy among the mass of the working peasants, centres of cultural and agricultural assistance to the peas-*



ant population. They got the best technology, applied the most advanced farming practices, and attracted most of the available experts. Industrial workers and also the most advanced and better organised section of the rural population, the rural proletariat, gravitated towards the state farms.

Establishments for renting out agricultural implements and machine, seed funds, veterinary and breeding centres, and other facilities set up at the state farms—all helped the peasants to raise the level of agriculture and the productivity of their farms. In the cultural field the recreation centres, libraries, reading rooms and study circles organised by the state farms attracted the peasants and awakened the desire for knowledge and active participation in social and economic life.

### 3. EMERGENCE OF COLLECTIVE ASSOCIATIONS OF PEASANTS AS THE FIRST SHOOTS OF SOCIALISM IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

From the first years of Soviet power entirely new, socialist forms of economy—communes, artels, associations for common working of the land and other co-operative amalgamations of peasants—came into being. There were not many of them but they were the first shoots of socialism in the countryside.

The Communist Party saw these collective associations of peasants as the beginning of the socialist development of agriculture and attached great political and economic importance to them. By its whole economic policy from the very foundation of the Soviet state the Communist Party encouraged the initiative of the forward-looking peasants in organising collective farms and helped them both materially and in terms of organisation.

The first collective enterprises appeared at the beginning of 1918. As a rule, they sprang up as soon as privately-owned estates were expropriated, and developed their economic activities on their material and technical base. This was largely why they were mostly communes at the first stage of their existence. Throughout 1918 it was communes that usually appeared in the rural areas.

This is corroborated in the review published by the *Izvestia VTsIK* (Bulletin of the All-Russia C.E.C.), which reported that in 30 gubernias of the Soviet Republic the first 349 communes had been registered and that nearly all of them had been founded in

March-May 1918."<sup>1</sup> In the course of the year the number of communes steadily increased and by November, that is, two months after the first registration the number of communes totalled 950.

The first communes were set up on the same conditions as the state farms, that is to say, they were provided with a ready-made material base. Both types of enterprise consisted mainly of rural proletarians and poor peasants. This fact gave rise to serious arguments as to which was more important, the state farms or the communes, because there was only an insignificant difference between the two types. A clear answer to the question was given by Lenin, who in studying this initial experience of organising socialised farming came to the conclusion that the socialist transformation of agriculture should proceed in two directions.

[First,] there was the direction of organising state enterprises on the basis of the big estates and the lands of the state fund, which would be based on state property and exist as enterprises of a consistently socialist type.

[Second,] there was the direction of setting up collective enterprises, based on amalgamated means of production and the collective labour of the peasants themselves, which would develop with all-round material, financial and organisational assistance from the proletarian state and would also be farms of a socialist type.

Lenin's observations formed one of the guidelines for the Communist Party over a long period and showed it how to work for the socialist transformation of agriculture. They contained the idea of setting up two types of socialist enterprise in agriculture and two forms of social socialist property.

In 1918 and 1919 the Soviet Government passed a number of crucial decrees designed to further expand and strengthen state and collective enterprises in agriculture. Both the Communist Party and the Soviet authorities rendered immense material assistance to these enterprises, which were of a quite new organisational and economic type and had not yet fully established themselves. A big boost for the socialist enterprises in agriculture was given by the decree of the Soviet Government of 2 November 1918 "On the Special Fund for Measures to Develop Agriculture".

Despite considerable difficulties, internal and external, the Soviet Government set up a special fund of 1,000 million rubles for providing grants and loans for the improvement of agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup> Up to September 1918 no registration of collective enterprises was kept up in the central government agencies. It is therefore impossible to state exactly when the first communes were organised.

This fund was mainly intended to improve and develop agriculture and reorganise it on socialist lines. The decree laid it down that the grants and other allowances from this fund should be assigned first and foremost to the agricultural communes and labour associations, and then to the various rural societies or groups on condition that they abandoned private farming for common cultivation and harvesting of the fields.

The working peasantry greeted this decree of the Soviet Government with great enthusiasm. The People's Commissariat for Agriculture received numerous requests from the local land agencies and peasants for financial assistance in organising collective enterprises. In a study of distribution of this fund made jointly by the People's Commissariat for Agriculture and representatives of the co-operative associations it was noted that "the process of collectivisation of agricultural labour is proceeding with great intensity".<sup>1</sup>

The People's Commissariat for Agriculture gave every support to the initiatives of the forward-looking peasants who wanted to set up the new types of farm, and was prompt in dealing with the requests of the local land agencies, which were granted large funds for such purposes.

At the same time the Communist Party warned the communes and artels against sponging attitudes and drew their attention to the need to seek internal resources by raising productivity. "What we must be most careful about is that the peasants should not say of members of communes, artels and co-operatives that they are state pensioners, that they differ from the peasants only by the fact that they are receiving privileges...."

"We must be able to show the peasants the practical realisation of this new order even *without* state aid."<sup>2</sup>

The socialist road was something of which the countryside had no knowledge or experience and therefore presented considerable obstacles. The Party and the Soviet authorities had to make tremendous efforts to convince the peasants that this was the right road, to show them in practice all the benefits of the collective approach to farming. Lenin said that "only when it has been proved in practice, by experience comprehensible to the peasants, that the transition to the co-operative, artel form of farming is essential and possible, shall we be entitled to say that in this vast peasant

<sup>1</sup> Central State Archive of the October Revolution (further CSAOR), f. 478, op. 1, d. 20, 1. 152.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at the First Congress of Agricultural Communes and Agricultural Artels, December 4, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, Moscow, 1974, pp. 198-200.

country, Russia, an important step towards socialist agriculture has been taken".<sup>1</sup>

And this first serious step towards establishing socialism in the countryside was indeed taken by the Communist Party in the first years of Soviet power. Starting from 1919 collective farming became more and more organised. As the number of communes increased, artels and associations for common cultivation of the land also began to spring up everywhere. Gradually these types of farm began to set up on allotment lands as well. There was not a single gubernia without collective enterprises. According to the information recorded by the Central Bureau of Communes for March 1919, 34 gubernias of Soviet Russia had registered 1,693 communes and 601 artels.

Reports came in from every corner of the Soviet Republic testifying to the growth of the collective movement.

*The new road of collective farming was blazed by the progressive forces of the Soviet countryside under the leadership of the Communist Party with the all-round assistance of the Soviets.* Delighted by this great initiative, Lenin became convinced that total victory of socialism in agriculture was irreversible. "...I am certain," he said, "that, with your general and unanimous support we shall bring about a situation when each of the several thousand existing communes and artels will become a genuine nursery for communist ideas and views among the peasants, a practical example showing them that, although it is still a small and feeble growth, it is nevertheless not an artificial, hothouse growth, but a true growth of the new socialist system."<sup>2</sup>

*[The first feature of the collectivisation movement of those days was the diversity of forms of socialised enterprise: communes, artels, associations for joint cultivation of the land, and so on.*

As the collective enterprises were organised it became apparent that the agricultural communes were less acceptable to the working peasants than other, more elementary types of collective enterprise. From the figures given below we can see that the agricultural artels soon forged ahead and became the predominant type of collective enterprise while the communes dropped back into second place.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at the First Congress of Agricultural Communes and Agricultural Artels, December 4, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Five Years of Soviet Power*, p. 351 (in Russian).

Years	Types of farm			Total
	Communes	Artels	Elementary associations	
1918	950	—	—	950
1919	1,617	3,888	804	6,309
1920	2,160	9,155	1,469	12,784
1921	3,040	10,490	2,039	15,569

*The second feature* was that the first collective enterprises of the commune and artel type had been set up mainly on the former estates, the monastery and private farms and the lands of the state fund. This is shown, for example, by the following indices: 93 per cent of the communes and about 70 per cent of the artels were set up on lands of this type. The associations for joint cultivation of the land, on the other hand, were as a rule, set up on allotment land. So in the districts where the estates formed the basis for collectivised farming the predominant form was the agricultural commune. And, on the contrary, in districts where this basis was provided by allotment lands, the basic form of collectivised farming was more elementary, such as the associations for joint cultivation of the land. It was these associations that took the lead in the next stage of organising collectivised farming.

As the fund of private lands became exhausted, the base for the growth of communes narrowed. At the same time the base for the simplest types of collective enterprise expanded inasmuch as they were being set up mainly on allotment lands where the peasants were pooling their implements and other resources. Conditions were also being created for a bigger recruitment of the middle peasant for these collective enterprises as the basic owner of allotment land and agricultural implements.

*The third feature* of the collectivisation movement lay in the class composition of the collective enterprises of those times. The initiators and organisers of the first communes and agricultural artels were industrial workers who came from the towns to help the villages. It was their support that helped the rural proletariat and poor peasants to move up into the front ranks of collectivised farming. Numerous reports from the local authorities indicate that most of the communes and artels were composed of farm labourers and poor peasants.



the working peasants. From the outset they felt all the material and intellectual benefits of emancipation from landowner and capitalist oppression and were drawn towards the building of a new life. Consequently the great ideas of liberation that the revolution had put into practice exerted a fruitful influence on the minds of the mass of the working peasants and stimulated tremendous revolutionary energy and creative initiative, rousing them to fight for the destruction of the old principles of life and set up new, socialist principles.

[*Second*,] the all-round support and assistance given by the Soviet authorities inspired the peasant masses to take an active part in the struggle for new, advanced forms of farming. This assistance that the Communist Party and the Soviet authorities gave to the working peasants was truly incalculable. Suffice it to mention such facts as the free transfer of land, implements, animals and buildings to the peasants; the cancellation of numerous peasant debts; the release of the poorest sections of the rural population from taxes; the state grants; and the ending of exploitation by landowners. If we add to this the immense political and moral support that the working peasants received from the working class, the total aid acquires a value that is indeed impossible to assess.

[*Third*,] the appearance of collective enterprises was also due to the fact that the Communist Party was able to identify and unite the rural proletariat and the poorest peasants as an independent class force, to activate these sections and stimulate their political consciousness. A key role was played by the Poor Peasants' Committees as rural revolutionary class organisations which rallied the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat into a mighty force that developed the socialist revolution in the countryside. "Only as the proletarian movement succeeds in the countryside shall we systematically pass to collective common ownership of land and to socialised farming. This could only be done with the backing of a purely proletarian movement in the countryside, and in this respect a great deal still remains to be done."<sup>1</sup>

[*Fourth*,] nationalisation of the land was a powerful instrument for organising collective enterprises. "It is simply absurd to imagine that after the abolition of private property of land everything in Russia will remain as before."<sup>2</sup> The abolition of private

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Moscow Party Workers' Meeting, November 27, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*. Vol. 24, p. 284.

ownership and nationalisation of the land were, of course, transitional measures. "They were not socialism, but they were measures that would lead to socialism by gigantic strides."<sup>1</sup> The adoption of collectivisation by the advanced and most politically conscious section of the working peasants began from the moment when private property in land was abolished and the land was nationalised.

The new historical stage in the development of the Soviet countryside was characterised by the temporary coexistence of two different economic structures: the old, small-commodity peasant economy and the emerging new, socialist structure in the shape of the collective and state enterprises. The process of this development went hand in hand with an intensification of the struggle between the socialist and capitalist elements, with a gradual build-up of strength in the socialist structure and the decline of the old, private-capitalist structure. Thanks to the determined application of Lenin's policies, this struggle culminated in the complete victory of the socialist structure in the countryside, the liquidation of the small-commodity peasant economy and the final elimination of all capitalist elements.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Extraordinary All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 332.



**Part IV**

**THE SOVIET PEASANTRY  
IN THE FIRST STAGE  
OF THE TRANSITIONAL  
PERIOD FROM  
CAPITALISM TO  
SOCIALISM**



## CHAPTER XIV

# THE PARTY'S AGRARIAN POLICY DURING THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

## 1. TRANSITION TO NEP—A SHARP TURN IN PARTY'S ECONOMIC POLICY

The Bolshevik Party has inherited Lenin's art of revolutionary leadership of the masses. It possesses a thorough knowledge of the laws of social development and scientific prevision. One must have a goal in order to move forward. Immutable convictions and selfless struggle are required to realise this goal. The Party's transition from War Communism to the New Economic Policy, which entailed a sharp turn in all areas of life in the young Soviet state, is an outstanding example of revolutionary action.

The classics of Marxism-Leninism have theoretically shown that a transitional period from capitalism to socialism in countries which have accomplished a socialist revolution is historically necessary. During this period the proletariat, under the leadership of the Communist Party, must reorganise social and economic structures and create conditions for establishing new social forces, capable of building socialist society. The Leninist principles of NEP, which are an essential and natural progression for all countries turning from capitalism to socialism, fully accorded with the spirit and nature of this transitional stage.

In the case of Russia these principles derived from the situation in which the young socialist republic found itself. The four-year imperialist and three-year civil wars had seriously drained the country's economy. Two ruinous wars had resulted in the devastation of entire districts, huge human losses and epidemics. In addition drought had led to crop failure in the Volga area and in many other districts and had brought famine to millions of peasants in the spring of 1921. This unusually widespread famine added to the already cruel suffering of the people and made economic construction more difficult.

Agriculture, bled dry by the wars and the natural disaster, was

in severe decline. In 1916 there had been 79.2 million dessiatines of land under cultivation. By 1920 there were 60.5 million dessiatines, a decrease of nearly 19 million. In 1921 the crop area again shrank by 7.3 million to 53.2 million dessiatines. The land was being poorly worked, and this led to a fall in crop yields. In 1920 this caused a loss of roughly 1,500-2,000 million poods, and general agricultural production was only 40 per cent of its pre-war level.

Livestock farming, especially of draught animals, was also in a sad state. In 1921, the country had only 68 per cent of the 1916 livestock population, and in some districts the percentage was even lower: 63 per cent in the Russian Federation, 58 per cent in the Central Agricultural Area, 58 per cent in the Urals, 44 per cent in the Lower Volga, 56 per cent in the South-East, 34 per cent in the steppe lands, etc.<sup>1</sup>

**Livestock Population in European and Asiatic Russia**  
(excluding Volynsk Gubernia, the Trans-Caucasus,  
Turkestan, and the Far East) within Comparable  
Borders<sup>2</sup> (in million head)

Types of livestock	1916	1920	1922	% of 1916	
				1920	1922
Horses of all ages	29.2	23.9	18.2	82.2	62.3
Cattle	46.9	37.4	31.8	79.8	67.8
Sheep and lambs	77.3	44.8	39.0	57.9	50.4
Goats . . . . .	3.2	1.1	1.0	34.3	31.3
Pigs of all ages . . . . .	18.0	14.5	7.0	89.5	38.8
Total . . . . .	175.3	122.8	97.3	75.7	55.5
Same in terms of large animals . . . . .	68.8	57.3	45.2	83.2	65.7

The huge livestock losses were a catastrophe for the countryside: in Russia a horse and cow were the minimum; to fall any further meant becoming a member of the proletariat.

While the Red Army was winning the Civil War and Soviet

<sup>1</sup> Figures taken from *Collected Statistical Data on the USSR, 1918-23*, Moscow, 1924, pp. 136-39 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> See: *Na novykh putyakh* (On the New Path). Results of the New Economic Policy, 1921-22. Issue 5, Part I, Moscow, 1923, p. 115 (in Russian).

power was strengthening its position, the economy was in severe decline. In the countryside small-scale peasant farming, which was being ever more seriously disrupted by War Communism, continued to hold complete sway.

The decline of agriculture had a disastrous effect upon industry. Shortages of raw materials, fuel and foodstuffs led to the closure of factories. The proletariat disintegrated as a class and returned to the land. Discontent grew both among peasants and workers. This prepared the ground for the Kronstadt mutiny in March of 1921. Although the mutiny was not a serious threat, Lenin saw its implications and drew the appropriate political conclusions.

The peasants' demand for the abolition of the food surplus appropriation system and for the resumption of free trade met a warm response from the workers. During the Civil War the peasants had understood the necessity of appropriation and accepted privations to ensure that Soviet power remained. As soon as the Civil War and foreign intervention came to an end, the peasants began to press for the abolition of appropriation as an unendurable burden in peacetime, hindering the rehabilitation and growth of their farms. "The surplus-food appropriation system in the rural districts ... hindered the growth of the productive forces and proved to be the main cause of the profound economic and political crisis that we experienced in the spring of 1921."<sup>1</sup>

The situation demanded that the Party radically change its economic policy in order to remove the obstacles which were hindering the development of the productive forces and the strengthening of the political and economic alliance of the working class and the peasant masses. The nature of this alliance had to be altered to suit peacetime construction.

The Party had to establish an economic policy that would expand the exchange of industrial and agricultural products. In the spring of 1921 Lenin became firmly convinced of the necessity for a sharp turn in the Party's economic policy, for introducing the New Economic Policy. And this time in all earnest and for a long time. It was essential to make full use of the real and lengthy respite which the end of the Civil War had given Soviet power. The Party had, moreover, been prepared for this transition by the discussion about trade unions, which occurred on the eve of the Tenth Party Congress and gave rise to acute inter-party struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 64.

When introducing the New Economic Policy, Lenin posed the central question: "...how to establish economic relations between the proletarian state power, with an incredibly devastated large-scale industry, and the small farmers, and how to find forms of coexistence with them, who as long as they remain small farmers, cannot exist without their small economy having some system of exchange."<sup>1</sup>

This burning question was the most important and yet the most difficult for the young socialist state. Guided by Lenin's instructions, the Party found the correct solution. It chose the course of rehabilitating and expanding the economy, of gradually preparing it for the transition to new, socialist principles through mutually profitable economic and political relations between the working class and the peasantry.

*A. Establishing Economic Relations Between the Working Class and the Peasantry to Suit the Transitional Period from Capitalism to Socialism*

The Communist Party evolved its new economic policy taking into account the special features of the country's economic and class structure after the October Revolution. In his report to the Tenth Party Congress and in his article "The Tax in Kind", which appeared in May 1921, Lenin showed that there had been no fundamental changes in the country's social and economic structure since 1918. The economy was still backward and structurally diverse which complicated the work of the Party and Soviet power. "Russia is so vast and so varied, that all these different types of socio-economic structures are intermingled. This is what constitutes the specific feature of the situation."<sup>2</sup>

In controlling socialist construction, the Party had to consider this structural diversity of the Soviet economy and to establish a policy ensuring that the socialist structure would predominate over all others. Although the socialist structure controlled the commanding heights of the country's economy, petty-commodity production still predominated. The petty-bourgeois element was hindering important socialist changes. The main problem was to overcome the petty-bourgeois element, and to direct petty-commod-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Tax in Kind", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 331.

ity peasant farming into the correct channel, to subordinate it to state control.

*The main task of economic construction, therefore, was to establish relations between town and countryside which would permit the proletariat to fulfil its historical mission, that of building socialism.* The peasantry, of course, would not back the proletariat unless the economic policy was correct and satisfied the needs of the working peasants. "The correct policy of the proletariat exercising its dictatorship in a small-peasant country is to obtain grain in exchange for the manufactured goods the peasant needs."<sup>1</sup>

But it was difficult to provide the peasant with enough industrial products, when the country was in such a state of ruin. Lenin held that the solution was, firstly, to re-establish free trade and give a free hand to the small-scale producer, and, secondly, to re-establish small-scale industry, this being the most rapid way of helping the peasants and raising the productivity of farming. He stressed that there was no need to fear the growth of the petty bourgeoisie and small capitalists. The continuing want and food shortages, which were weakening the proletariat and disarming it in the face of petty bourgeois vacillations, were more to be feared, he said.

Lenin likened the highly contradictory situation to a vicious circle. To maintain the alliance of the working class and peasants and revive large-scale state industry, which alone could lead the country to socialism, it was first of all essential to improve peasant farming and small industry. This meant, however, that to some extent the doors to capitalism had to be opened. It was necessary to channel the reviving capitalism into state capitalism.

The last *possible* and the only rational policy, wrote Lenin, was not to attempt to ban or block the growth of capitalism, but to channel it into state capitalism. "The whole problem—in theoretical and practical terms—is to find the correct methods of directing the development of capitalism (which is to some extent and for some time inevitable) into the channels of state capitalism, and to determine how we are to hedge it about with conditions to ensure its transformation into socialism in the near future."<sup>2</sup>

The transition to NEP was first of all an economic concession to the small peasant producer, giving him a material interest in the results of his labour. This was the only policy that permitted us to "...first set to work in this small-peasant country to build solid

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 345.

gangways to socialism by way of state capitalism.”<sup>1</sup> This was greatly facilitated by the change from food surplus appropriation to the tax in kind.

The Tenth Party Congress, taking the new conditions into account, and taking Lenin's report as a basis adopted the following decision: “In order to manage the economy correctly and peacefully, where farmers can more freely dispose of their economic resources, in order to strengthen peasant farming and increase its productivity and also in order to set the obligations of farmers to the state at a fixed rate, appropriation as a means of state procurement of food, raw materials and fodder will be replaced by the tax in kind.”<sup>2</sup>

On 21 March 1921, the All-Russia Central Executive Committee followed up this decision by a decree replacing food and raw material appropriation by the tax in kind. This decree gave NEP legislative backing. It indicated that market relations had to be expanded which in turn would stimulate the peasant to improve his farm and increase its productivity. The main aim was to ensure that farms were correctly and confidently managed and that the peasant could freely dispose of the products of his labour and his economic means.

A progressive taxation principle was introduced, which fixed a certain percentage to be deducted from the goods produced, depending on the size of the farm. For example, middle peasants' farms, small farms and those belonging to town workers connected with agriculture were taxed at a lower rate. Certain tax relief was provided for the most industrious farmers, who increased their crop area. The principle of mutual responsibility for surplus appropriation, which had applied during War Communism, was replaced by each peasant being personally responsible for the taxation of his farm.

All food, raw material and fodder remaining after taxation could be used at the peasant's discretion for improving his farm or for obtaining industrial products. The tax in kind was almost half the appropriation amount (the tax in kind for 1921-22 was fixed at 240 million poods instead of the 423 million poods appropriated in 1920-21). Lenin evaluated this switch in economic policy thus: “...the question of substituting a tax for surplus-grain appropriation is primarily and mainly a political question, for it is essen-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions...*, Vol. 2, p. 256.



tially a question of the attitude of the working class to the peasantry."<sup>1</sup>

*The main aims of the Communist Party's New Economic Policy were to build a new socialist economy together with the peasants, strengthen the commercial and industrial link of town and countryside and expand trade.* Trade became the main form of economic relations between the working class and the peasantry. "Trade is the 'link' in the historical chain of events, in the transitional forms of our socialist construction in 1921-22," wrote Lenin, "which we, the proletarian government, we, the ruling Communist Party, 'must grasp with all our might'. If we 'grasp' this link firmly enough now we shall certainly control the whole chain in the very near future. If we do not, we shall not control the whole chain, we shall not create the foundation for socialist social and economic relations."<sup>2</sup>

On 24 May 1921, the Soviet Government issued a special decree "On Exchange", which would expand trade. It legalised commercial relations in the country, permitted buying and selling as one of the links between town and countryside. The decree indicated that, in view of the lack of goods, trade should be carried out mainly by buying and selling agricultural produce and goods manufactured by domestic industry. The production rate of state industry was still too low, and could in no way satisfy the free market.

The problem of expanding trade relations and increasing goods output was closely linked with the problem of reviving domestic industry. On 7 July 1921, the Soviet Government issued the decree "On Domestic and Petty Industry", which gave the utmost encouragement to its growth. The decree stated that petty and domestic industry should provide the peasant population with essential goods until large-scale industry could do so. The former could more rapidly ensure the necessary flow of goods to agriculture.

This decree gave every citizen the right to engage in domestic production and to set up industrial enterprises employing up to 20 persons. The goods produced could be freely disposed of. All petty industry was exempted from municipalisation and industrialisation. The aim was not to hinder the peasant craftsman and petty

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)" *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 113.

producers from freely disposing of their goods and to avoid reglamentation that would restrict the initiative of individuals and groups.

We should note that in these early days the Party and Soviet power were as concerned with trade exchange as with expanding market relations. "It implied a more or less socialist exchange throughout the country of the products of industry for the products of agriculture, and by means of that commodity exchange the restoration of large-scale industry as the sole basis of socialist organisation." However, in the first year of resumed market relations and commodity exchange "nothing came of commodity exchange; the private market proved too strong ... and instead of the exchange of commodities we got ordinary buying and selling, trade."<sup>1</sup>

After analysing the economic life in the first year of NEP, the Party concluded that the introduction of "the free commodity exchange" was only the first step in economic retreat. This, it had been shown, was not enough. "...You are all now well aware of it from your own practical experience, and it is also evident from our press, that this system of commodity exchange has broken down; it has broken down in the sense that it has assumed the form of buying and selling," wrote Lenin. "And we must now admit this if we do not want to bury our heads in the sand, if we do not want to be like those who do not know when they are beaten, if we are not afraid of looking danger straight in the face. We must admit that we have not retreated far enough, that we must make a further retreat..."<sup>2</sup>

In his speech to the Seventh Moscow Gubernia Party Conference on 29 October 1921, Lenin therefore put forward the policy of speeding up the revival of finance and developing the return to trade and finance as an extremely important means of expanding trade and market relations. This step met with certain vacillations on the part of communists who had grown used to War Communism. They began to view Lenin's proposals as "a surrender of Marxist positions".

In November of 1921 this led Lenin to publish a special article entitled "The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism". This was a reply to those who were against reviving a monetary economy: "We shall not surrender to "senti-

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Seventh Moscow Gubernia Conference of the Russian Communist Party", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 95-96.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 96.

mental socialism" or to the old Russian semi-aristocratic, semi-muzhik and patriarchal mood, with their supreme contempt for trade. We can use, and, since it is necessary, we *must* learn to use, all transitional economic forms for the purpose of strengthening the link between the peasantry and the proletariat, for the purpose of immediately reviving the economy of our ruined and tormented country, of improving industry, and facilitating such future, more extensive and more deep-going, measures as electrification."<sup>1</sup>

In this article Lenin dealt with the importance of understanding the difference between reform and revolution before and after the victory of the socialist revolution. "Before the victory of the proletariat, reforms are a by-product of the revolutionary class struggle. After the victory (while still remaining a 'by-product' on an international scale) they are, in addition, for the country in which victory has been achieved, a necessary and legitimate breathing space when, after the utmost exertion of effort, it becomes obvious that sufficient strength is lacking for the revolutionary accomplishment of some transition or another."<sup>2</sup>

*The national task was to raise agricultural productivity and create the conditions to incorporate it into large-scale socialist economy.* In such a country the proletariat's role is to direct the transition of these small proprietors to socialised and collective work."<sup>3</sup> But this transition could not be accomplished immediately, as the necessary material and technical basis did not exist. "The only way to solve this problem of the small farmer—to improve, so to speak, his mentality—is through the material basis, technical equipment, the extensive use of tractors and other farm machinery and electrification on a mass scale. This would remake the small farmer fundamentally and with tremendous speed."<sup>4</sup> Manpower, resources and time were needed to create this material and technical basis.

It was imperative to rapidly find the necessary means and organise internal forces to rehabilitate and build large-scale industry. It was obvious that in a country where the peasantry made up the overwhelming majority of the population, success greatly depended on how far the Party could establish the correct relations between the working class and the peasantry.

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 217.

These relations were complicated and varied. "We must create," said Lenin, "such relations between the working class and the peasantry—the only classes that can serve as a base on which to build up our economy—and such an alliance between them as will economically satisfy both sides. It must be an alliance in which the small peasant will be reckoned with as a small peasant, until we are able to provide him with all the products of large-scale industry."<sup>1</sup>

The small peasant in the Soviet countryside was the middle peasant, who had become the main figure in agriculture after the October Revolution. To establish the correct relations between the working class and the peasantry, it was essential to find and define the correct economic policy towards the middle peasant and to establish a state economy that would suit his economy.

Huge difficulties, therefore, stood in the way of constructing the new socialist economy. The Communist Party had to build large-scale industry; create afresh the material and technical basis of socialist society; establish the correct relations between the working class and the mass of the peasantry; strengthen the prolonged political and economic alliance with the middle peasantry; create the conditions for changing small peasant farming into large-scale socialist farming and ensure the victory of the socialist structure in all spheres of the economy. ✓

### *B. Regrouping Class Forces and Preparing for Socialism's All-Out Offensive*

The Communist Party was well aware that allowing free trade and market relations and encouraging private economic initiative would inevitably lead to the revival of capitalist elements, to the appearance of "Nepmen", who would constitute a new Soviet bourgeoisie. The New Economic Policy was intended to and did permit a tremendous contest between two forces and tendencies—capitalism and socialism.

As the economy grew, the extremely acute historical question—'who will come out on top?'—inexorably demanded an answer. *On the one hand*, the capitalist elements, using the privileges of NEP, hurried to use commodity circulation to conquer the market, and thereby to penetrate industry, seize the economic commanding

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech Delivered at the Third All-Russia Food Conference, June 16, 1921", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 447.

heights and defeat the socialist structure. On the other, the socialist state, in charge of the economic commanding heights, opposed the capitalist elements with powerful revolutionary force and prevented them from establishing economic superiority.

*The socialist state relied on state control as a key economic factor, on economic and co-operative organisations to be able to weaken the capitalist elements by controlling all forms of commodity circulation and directing it into the channel which would consolidate the trade and productive link of town and countryside, rehabilitate large-scale industry and thereby create a powerful economic basis for socialism. At the same time, despite the scientific foundations of Soviet power's assurance that the victory of socialist elements over capitalist elements was inevitable, there was a grave danger of capitalist forces expanding and consolidating.*

Lenin expounded the theoretical principles of socialist management during the transitional period in his report to the Tenth Congress of the RCP(B) and his article "The Tax in Kind". He continued to explain and develop them throughout 1921. In his article "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution", he again emphasised the necessity for good management: "The proletarian state must become a cautious, assiduous and shrewd 'business-man', a punctilious *wholesale merchant*—otherwise it will never succeed in putting this small-peasant country economically on its feet. Under existing conditions, living as we are side by side with the capitalist (for the time being capitalist) West, there is no other way of progressing to communism. A wholesale merchant seems to be an economic type as remote from communism as heaven from earth. But that is one of the contradictions which, in actual life, lead from a small-peasant economy via state capitalism to socialism. Personal incentive will step up production..."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin described the struggle between the two tendencies as a grave economic war. The fundamental question was, who would first take advantage of the new situation, whom would the peasantry follow—the proletariat building socialist society, or the capitalists? Who would forestall whom? "We must face this issue squarely—who will come out on top? Either the capitalists succeed in organising first—in which case they will drive out the Communists and that will be the end of it. Or the proletarian state power, with the support of the peasantry, will prove capable of

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 59.

keeping a proper rein on those gentlemen, the capitalists, so as to direct capitalism along state channels..."<sup>1</sup>

Which forces should Soviet power rely on in this economic struggle?

This was Lenin's answer: firstly, on the working class, which as industry expanded would increase and consolidate; secondly, on the economic advance and rapid improvement in the material position of the peasantry. "You will have capitalists beside you, including foreign capitalists, concessionaires and leaseholders. They will squeeze profits out of you amounting to hundreds per cent; they will enrich themselves, operating alongside of you. Let them. Meanwhile you will learn from them the business of running the economy, and only when you do that will you be able to build up a communist republic."<sup>2</sup>

The Trotskyites panicked when confronted with these difficulties and joined with the "left communists" in shrieking hysterically that the Party's NEP was a mistake. They saw it as a complete class retreat, contrasting it to War Communism which was obviously out-of-date. These intriguers used "left" phrases to disguise their real position, unanimously defended and praised state coercion, decisively rejected the economic link between town and countryside, and rejected the possibility of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry. This showed the Trotskyites and the "left communists" to be opposed to Lenin in their views on building socialism in one country. They had no faith in the internal forces of the Soviet state, denied the working class its leading role and ability to attract the many millions of peasants.

The Communist Party rejected the anti-Marxist ideas of the oppositionists and wholly accepted Lenin's policy of economic construction. Guided by Lenin, it steadfastly strengthened all the links within state, economic and co-operative organisations, inspired Party and Soviet workers to unremittingly improve economic and commercial activities, rallied the peasantry around the working class and thereby ensured the country's economic revival, the economy's overall progress.

In this new difficult stage of economic construction, the Party, supported by the revolutionary power of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialist commanding heights of the economy, had, in a short time, to gain control of the economy, trade, credit and co-operation. These powerful levers of state control would

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin. "The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

oppose private capital. *The Party required essentially that people learn to manage and trade better and with more education than the capitalist trader. Party guidance had to manifest itself in knowledge of the economy and management.*

The Communist Party, as it applied NEP and made concessions to the middle peasantry in order to strengthen the state, did not compromise its class positions, nor did it change its fundamental policy leading to the victory of socialist construction. Even today Lenin's words are prophetic. He said that the Party had made the necessary retreats in economic policy to "link up with the peasant masses, with the rank-and-file working peasants, and begin to move forward immeasurably, infinitely more slowly than we expected, but in such a way that the entire mass will actually move forward with us. If we do that we shall in time progress much more quickly than we even dream of today."<sup>1</sup>

Changing from War Communism to NEP brought considerable results. Even in the autumn of 1921 Lenin noted that the economic retreat was leading to the country's revival. He wrote: "Victory creates such a 'reserve of strength' that it is possible to hold out even in a forced retreat, hold out both materially and morally. Holding out materially means preserving a sufficient superiority of forces to prevent the enemy from inflicting utter defeat. Holding out morally means ... preserving vigour and firmness of spirit, even retreating a long way, but not too far, and in such a way as to stop the retreat in time and revert to the offensive."<sup>2</sup>

The economic retreat lasted for a year. By the spring of 1922 its advantages and disadvantages were obvious. Despite the famine, the young socialist state's economy was definitely on the road to recovery. Lenin decisively rebuffed the imperialists when, at the Genoa Conference, they tried to test Soviet power's strength by offering credit in exchange for the return of lost property to the capitalists. In March 1922, he said: *'We shall go to the merchants and agree to do business, continuing our policy of concessions; but the limits of these concessions are already defined. What we have given the merchants in our agreements up to now has been a step backward in our legislation; but we shall not retreat any further.'*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 271-72.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The International and Domestic Situation of the Soviet Republic", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 225.

The 11th Party Congress in March and April 1922, reviewed the first year of NEP and noted the overall revival of the country's economy. In his report to the Congress Lenin analysed economic construction and set the Party new tasks. He pointed out that the goal set had been achieved and warned against excessive concessions to private capital, as these would lead capitalist elements to seriously threaten socialist construction. His economic and class analysis led Lenin to create a new slogan – an end to retreat: “For a year we have been retreating. On behalf of the Party we must now call a halt. The purpose pursued by the retreat has been achieved. This period is drawing, or has drawn, to a close. We now have a different objective, that of regrouping our forces.”<sup>1</sup>

At the 11th Congress Lenin set two extremely important tasks: *firstly*, to re-group class forces, which would lead to the complete victory of the socialist structure over all other economic structures; *secondly*, to assess the correct moment to begin socialism's decisive offensive against capitalist elements, especially against the last and largest exploiting class – the kulaks. Lenin stated why it was historically necessary to liquidate the kulaks as a class and pointed out that the Party had to conduct a final and conclusive battle “...against Russian capitalism, against the capitalism that is growing out of the small-peasant economy, the capitalism that is fostered by the latter. Here we shall have a fight on our hands in the immediate future and the date of it cannot be fixed exactly.”<sup>2</sup>

While class forces were regrouping the Party had to create the conditions and to acquire the necessary material and technical resources, organisational and political experience, in order to prepare for the all-out socialist offensive against capitalist elements in town and countryside. This offensive had to culminate in the socialist structure prevailing throughout the economy. It took more than seven years to regroup class forces. By the second half of 1929 socialism was conducting its final all-out offensive against capitalist elements.

One year after the 11th Party Congress Lenin again returned to the alliance of the working class and the peasantry, to the consolidation of the economic link between town and countryside. But he now saw these questions in a different light: in connection with expanding and strengthening socialist relations rather than in connection with state capitalism. He stresses this in his last speeches

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)” *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 277.



and articles, which were to be his political testament to the Party. Here Lenin lays down the principles of Soviet industrialisation along socialist lines, shows how a socialist state must accumulate resources in a different way from capitalist states and reveals new natural progressions for Soviet industrialisation.

In his article "Better Fewer, but Better", published on 4 March 1923, he wrote: "We must strive to build up a state in which the workers retain the leadership of the peasants, in which they retain the confidence of the peasants, and by exercising the greatest economy remove every trace of extravagance from our social relations.... If we see to it that the working class retains its leadership over the peasantry, we shall be able, by exercising the greatest possible thrift in the economic life of our state, to use every saving we make to develop our large-scale machine industry...."<sup>1</sup>

V. I. Lenin had boundless faith in the people's constructive forces and believed that, despite the tremendous difficulties, socialist industry could be built up by internal forces and resources. He concentrated on creating Soviet heavy industry—socialism's fundamental material and technical basis. He spoke figuratively when he said that only then could we change "...from the peasant, muzhik horse of poverty, from the horse of an economy designed for a ruined peasant country, to the horse which the proletariat is seeking and must seek—the horse of large-scale machine industry of electrification, of the Volkhov Power Station, etc."<sup>2</sup>

In his articles, Lenin regarded in a different light the question of co-operation which would play a major role in transforming agriculture along socialist lines and include the peasantry in the socialist construction. "All we actually need under NEP is to organise the population of Russia in co-operative societies on a sufficiently large scale, for we have now found that degree of combination of private interest, of private commercial interest, with state supervision and control of this interest, that degree of its subordination to the common interests which was formerly the stumbling-block for very many socialists. Indeed, the power of the state, over all large-scale means of production, political power in the hands of the proletariat, the alliance of this proletariat with the many millions of small and very small peasants, the assured proletarian leadership of the peasantry, etc.,—is this not all ... that is necessary to build a complete socialist society?"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Better Fewer, but Better", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 504.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On Co-operation", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 468.

Finally, Lenin wrote with clarity about democratisation of the state apparatus, opposing its growth and the least signs of bureaucracy and formalism. In his opinion, such objective factors as industrialising the country, transforming agriculture along socialist lines and profoundly revolutionising culture would greatly help to achieve these goals. The subjective factor of involving the workers and peasants in the running of the state would also be a powerful way of opposing bureaucracy in the state apparatus. His famous work *How We Should Reorganise the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection* is devoted to this theme.

The country of the Soviets had complete faith in the prophetic words uttered by Lenin at the formal session of the Moscow Soviet in November 1922: *NEP Russia will become socialist Russia.*

## 2. RAISING THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES OF AGRICULTURE

### AS AN IMPORTANT LINK IN THE CHAIN OF ECONOMIC CONSTRUCTION

The state of the economy at the end of the Civil War made the problems of increasing productive forces and rehabilitating industry, transport and agricultural production extremely acute.

The Party was well aware that only the development of heavy industry could ensure the Soviet country's political and economic independence. Lenin tirelessly explained that heavy industry was the basis for socialism which would facilitate the technical re-equipping of the country. Nevertheless they had to begin restoring the economy at the other end of the scale—by rehabilitating and improving agriculture. "...The first thing we need is immediate and serious measures to raise the productive forces of the peasantry."<sup>1</sup> "We have to understand that, with the peasant economy in the grip of a crisis, we can survive only by appealing to the peasants to help town and countryside."<sup>2</sup>

There could be no question of the country's economic life recovering without a decisive improvement in agriculture. Industrial enterprises needed raw materials, fuel, and food was needed for the working class. The Party considered that the peasantry, the overwhelming majority of the country's population, also hoped to

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Tax in Kind", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 185.

receive the comprehensive aid and support, which it so badly needed, from Soviet power.

The Party's enemies, adherents of the so-called workers' opposition, used "left" phrases to disguise their real attitude and accused the Party of retreating from the class positions of the proletariat and of deviating from Marxism. Lenin conclusively disproved these slanderous attacks of the fractionists and showed the Party the correct way to combat ruin, to revive the economy and consolidate the political and economic power of the young socialist state. He constantly stressed that "we must start with the peasantry. Those who fail to understand this, and think this putting the peasantry in the forefront is 'renunciation' of the dictatorship of the proletariat, or something like that, simply do not stop to think, and allow themselves to be swayed by the power or words."<sup>1</sup>

The decisions of the Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets (December, 1920) were of tremendous historical importance for rehabilitating agriculture. The main subject of discussion was economic construction. Lenin's brilliant plan for the electrification of the country was put to the Congress delegates; the GOELRO plan opened up vast prospects for transforming the country's entire economy and building socialism.

Guided by Lenin, the Party put forward measures to rehabilitate and expand the country's agriculture as the initial plan to acquire the material forces to make a powerful start to economic construction, to be examined and approved by the Eighth Congress of Soviets.

Although the Congress's decision on agriculture bore the mark of War Communism, it nevertheless had a great effect upon the peasant masses. The Party set the chief goals of expanding cultivated land area to the maximum, increasing crop yields and achieving results that the peasantry had not envisaged and could not envisage under the tsars and the bourgeoisie. The Congress supported introducing state control by setting fixed crop-sowing plans for each peasant farm.

*The practical results of agricultural rehabilitation proved to be the most effective method of instilling the peasant masses with the idea of socialism. It was essential to introduce these ideas by practical methods: by raising the productive forces of agricultural production, by each successful example of increased crop cultivation and by increasing the gross and marketable output of agriculture. These were*

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Tax in Kind", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 341.

the main ideas behind the law passed by the Eighth Congress of Soviets.

In his speech to the Congress, Lenin focussed attention on providing comprehensive aid to the small peasant farmer.

The Eighth Congress of Soviets decreed that all Soviet departments and all public organisations must take urgent measures to assist agriculture. State control was implemented by forming special bodies: sowing committees in gubernias, uyezds and volosts, and agricultural peasant aid committees in village Soviets. These bodies actively assisted Soviet power and played an important economic role in the countryside.

Representatives from land organisations and peasants, elected at special peasant congresses, made up these sowing committees. They had to give practical assistance to peasant farms by obtaining seed, providing agricultural implements and manpower and ensuring that the planned area of land was sown. It was especially important to assist the poor and the small peasants. The Congress proposed providing local aid in the form of manpower to the poorest peasants.

The Congress of Soviets called on all agronomists and instructors to help apply the system of land tenure and the most advanced agricultural methods in the countryside. It was decided to award the most diligent peasants, who increased their crop area and applied the best land cultivation methods, bonuses as an incentive. This was the first step in introducing the peasant masses to Leninist principles of material incentives in order to improve agriculture.

Soviet power required primarily that sowing plans be fixed for each peasant farm and that diligent peasants be given incentives to use the best cultivation methods. The Congress announced that introducing the correct methods of agricultural management was the "great state duty of the peasant population".

The Party Central Committee's letter indicated the importance of the Eighth Congress of Soviet's decree "Measures to Strengthen and Expand Peasant Agriculture" and called on all Party organisations to explain this decree to the peasant masses.

The Party therefore directed its best forces to improving agriculture and again called on the working class to provide industrial assistance to the peasantry in order to bring agricultural campaigns to a successful conclusion. Brigades were formed in factories to repair agricultural implements. The Central Committee recommended that factory Party organisations form two kinds of brigade: the first type would make urgently needed agricultural

equipment in the factories, the second would go to the villages and repair equipment.

The Central Committee outlined a series of measures to ensure that the Eighth Congress of Soviets' decree was successfully implemented: mass peasant assemblies, conferences for non-Party peasants, comprehensive agronomic courses, etc. *The Communist Party called the eradication of agricultural ignorance "a serious, urgent, vast and necessary task", equal to the struggle undertaken during the Civil War.*

The decisions of the Ninth All-Russia Congress of Soviets in December 1921, continued the policy of rehabilitating and expanding agriculture. Its decisions stressed that improving agriculture was the main task of all economic construction. The requirements and special features of NEP constantly guided the Congress.

The land tenure system was the central aspect of the Ninth Congress of Soviets' resolution on rehabilitating agriculture. The Congress's resolution states: "While recognising that, in order to improve peasant economy, the lands, which are the permanent property of the workers' state, must be subject to constant correct utilisation, adapted to economic conditions and the way of life, the All-Russia Congress of Soviets considers that it is essential to concentrate on regulating land relations by allowing the peasantry to freely choose land tenure forms and by increasing work on the land tenure system."

This decision shows that the Communist Party and the Soviet Government were very concerned with increasing agricultural cultivation, introducing the necessary order into land tenure and improving land fertility. While, during the first years of the revolution, Soviet power had wrested the land from the rich and eliminated unjust land tenure, it now had to ensure that the liberated land was so utilised as to yield the maximum food-stuffs and raw material.

The Party, in charge of the practical rehabilitation of agriculture, saw the main task-in-hand as that of increasing economic initiative and constructive activity as much as possible. Lenin indicated that they had to begin with the most simple, ordinary measures, and primarily with eradicating agricultural ignorance, with spreading advanced agricultural methods among the peasantry. The Party Central Committee, therefore, instructed the Party organisations that Party politics advanced and agricultural methods should be explained in a way simple and comprehensible to the peasants and lead them to actively participate in discussing questions, to devising practical ways of improving agricultural

management. "Therefore," said the Party Central Committee's letter, "we must make the system of privileges and advantages for peasants who introduce any method of farm management the focal point of encouraging advanced agricultural methods."

However, the extremely unfavourable conditions of 1921 held back these measures. The Party concentrated all its material and organisational forces on counteracting the famine, which reigned in 28 gubernias, affecting more than 36 million people (46.5 per cent of the RSFSR's population). Two types of assistance were rendered to the starving population: firstly, providing food and seed to the starving, and secondly, evacuating the population of the famine-stricken gubernias to more favourable areas.

The grave consequences of 1921 were felt throughout the country's economy. The area of land under cultivation continued to decrease in the famine-stricken gubernias. The Party therefore adopted two different policies in the countryside: the campaign to improve land cultivation was in full swing in the gubernias not stricken by famine; in the others, all organisation was directed to aiding the starving population. The spring of 1922 was nevertheless a critical time for the growth of agriculture in Soviet Russia. Soviet land saw for the first time a real, large-scale battle to implement advanced agricultural and new management methods and to improve agricultural production.

In the autumn of 1922 preparations began for the sowing season. Workers, repair brigades, agronomists, veterinarians and other specialists came to the aid of the peasantry. The Central Committee decreed that Party and professional workers should go to the countryside to organise the spring sowing campaign.

One can imagine what a beneficial effect all these organisational and instructive forces had on life in the countryside. They revived the local Soviets, stimulated the sowing committees and peasant aid committees, created strong central groups of active peasants and restored the entire social and economic life of the countryside. The outside workers explained the agricultural policy of the Party and Soviet power and drew the peasants into an active political and economic life. *The unprecedented success and effectiveness of this many-faceted work was due to the skilful way in which political and agricultural activities were combined with economic goals.* During this campaign, the Party created and developed many varied ways of working with the peasant masses.

Educational courses were the *first form* of promoting advanced agricultural methods among the peasantry. 1922 saw the start of mass work on these courses, which took place everywhere and

which involved all the agronomic experts and instructors and the best peasant farmers. In April 1922, in 40 gubernias there were 1,550 agricultural courses, organised by local Party organisations.

The Soviet Government and Communist Party also made great efforts to create higher and secondary agricultural educational establishments, expanding and consolidating their material and educational basis in every possible way. So, despite the difficulties of the war period, over the first four and a half years of Soviet power the number of agricultural educational establishments increased by more than 100 per cent, and the number of students by 250 per cent. The data given below show this increase.<sup>1</sup>

**The Number of Agricultural Educational Establishments  
and Students before 1917 and in 1922**

	Higher education- al estab- lishments	Secondary and lower agricultural schools	Total	No. of student
Before the Revolution	9	185	194	10,000
In May 1922	50	358	408	35,000

Lectures, also given on a wide scale, constituted the second form of promoting advanced agricultural methods in the countryside. They were given by experts, agronomists and instructors from the rural areas.

Peasant conferences in volosts, uyezds and gubernias were the third form of stimulating the peasant masses and drawing them into the active campaign to expand agriculture and improve cultivation methods. For example, 617 conferences were held in Rязan gubernia, 250 in Penza gubernia, 518 in Smolensk gubernia, 98 in Kostroma gubernia, 277 in Nizhni Novgorod gubernia and 270 in Moscow gubernia. As a rule, the peasantry everywhere showed great interest in these conferences.

The conclusions drawn from these peasant conferences stated: "The 1922 spring agricultural campaign established the first planned, regular link with the broad peasant masses by means of village gatherings, and peasant conferences in volosts, uyezds and gubernias. All these meetings discussed the resolutions of the

<sup>1</sup> See: *Bednota*, 30 August 1922.

Soviet Government on agriculture and the planned measures to rehabilitate agriculture."

The Party Central Committee pointed out the positive results achieved by these conferences and bound all rural Party organisations to hold more advanced conferences on a wider scale in the winter of 1923. The Central Committee proposed to set up special commissions under the gubernia committees to take charge of this extremely important campaign.

Finally, agricultural exhibitions, held from 1923 were the *fourth, most effective form of promoting advanced agricultural methods*. These enabled the peasants to see for themselves the concrete results achieved by the most advanced peasant farms, agricultural artels and communes. These exhibitions were very popular among the peasantry.

By introducing advanced cultivation methods in agriculture the Communist Party sought to raise the intensity and increase the amount of marketable products of peasant farms and ensure the maximum possible increase in the productive forces of agriculture. The 11th Party Congress stated: "The Congress sees the first and most important aim of all Party work with the peasantry as rendering practical assistance in rapidly improving tillage, expanding land under cultivation, increasing the quantity of agricultural produce and reducing the needs of the peasantry. We must apply all our forces and means to supporting and stimulating assistance to the poorest peasants, by continuously devising measures which will in practice prove to be advantageous, even in these present difficult circumstances."<sup>1</sup>

The Party and Soviet power devoted constant attention to improving agriculture. The Tenth All-Russia Congress of Soviets gave it an important place. The Congress outlined new practical measures to introduce the most advanced agricultural methods, increase productivity and improve agricultural education.

The great drive of the peasant masses to increase agricultural productivity and improve land cultivation led the Tenth Congress of Soviets to recognise that special organs conducting the agricultural campaigns had become superfluous: the sowing committees, having fulfilled their tasks, were abolished and their functions were given to land organisations. Measures were taken to reinforce these latter by incorporating the best specialists, with whose help the Party trained huge numbers of agricultural staff from among the peasantry.

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<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 2, p. 334.



In the interests of rapidly rehabilitating and expanding agriculture, Soviet power rendered great material assistance to the peasantry, despite the difficulties of counteracting the famine. This meant primarily providing peasant farms with seed. Over a mere two years (1921-22) more than 103,566,456 poods of seed loans were issued to the peasants.

The Soviet Government had also to provide peasant farms with agricultural machinery and implements. Various machinery and equipment to the value of 350 million gold rubles were put at their disposal. Peasant farms were provided with credit of more than 15 million gold rubles to purchase means of production. According to incomplete data, in 1922 there were more than 3,932 centres hiring out agricultural implements to the peasants. These hiring centres had approximately 14,000 iron harrows, more than 2,500 seed-ing machines, about 30,000 harvesters, 2,000 sheafers and more than 3,700 threshing machines. Over 1921-22 1,715,000 gold rubles were spent in assisting peasants to combat agricultural pests.

These measures adopted by the Party and Government resulted in a noticeable improvement in the country's agriculture. The good harvest in 1922 restored agricultural economy, had a beneficial effect on the entire economy and also improved the material position of the working class and peasantry. Peasant farms fulfilled the tasks set ahead of schedule, built up reserves of seed and thereby laid the long-term foundations for improving agriculture in the future.

### 3. THE LAND CODE: THE FINAL STAGE IN REVOLUTIONARY AGRARIAN CHANGES

The New Economic Policy had radically changed the economic situation in the countryside and led to a review of land tenure forms, adapting them to the new methods of peasant farming. The ban on leasing land and hiring labour in particular, which together with petty-bourgeois equalising was the main effect of the Land Socialisation Law, passed in 1918, were now contradicting the new economic relations and slowing down the development of productive forces in agriculture. Attitudes to separate farms and holdings and individual forms of land tenure also had to be reviewed. In brief, the farmer had to be given complete freedom to manage his farm, in order to increase agricultural production.

The peasant masses, as well as Party and agricultural workers,

examined forms of land tenure during the transitional period. The way in which these questions were discussed bears witness to the topicality of these questions. The theses entitled "Land and Land Tenure Policy" published in the newspapers *Bednota* and *Selsk Khozyaistvennaya zhizn* formed the basis of this discussion. It continued for more than a year and eventually led to certain conclusions regarding the land question as a whole.

Life itself put the land question in the forefront of the Party's agrarian policy. It is enough to say that in the first two years of NEP it was discussed three times at top level: at the All-Russia Land Congress in December 1921, at the All-Russia Congress of Experts on Land Tenure and Reclamation in February 1922 and at the All-Russia Agronomic Congress in March of that year. These congresses made important recommendations on land tenure under NEP, which formed the basis of the new land law.

The 11th All-Russia Conference of the RCP(B), the Ninth All-Russia Congress of Soviets and the 11th Congress of the RCP(B) examined the land question. On the recommendation of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture's report "The Party's Immediate Tasks in Rehabilitating Agriculture", the decision of the 11th Party Conference stated that: "the Party's agricultural work should be based on the following:

- (a) keeping land nationalisation intact;
- (b) making peasant land tenure secure;
- (c) allowing the peasant population the freedom to choose land tenure forms;
- (d) creating all the conditions for peasant farms to function correctly and expand."<sup>1</sup>

Soviet power's great achievements in the countryside began with solving the land question and then introducing scientific farming methods. But by 1922 the land question had again come to the forefront, as further increasing labour productivity in agriculture and improving technology and land cultivation depended on it.

One of the most remarkable achievements of the October Revolution was that it united the land and scientific farming questions into a single, comprehensive complex for improving agriculture, and made it not only the foremost concern of the Party and Government, but also the handiwork of the peasants themselves. The Ninth Congress of Soviets played a major role by laying the foundations for improving the land tenure system. It was a turning phase in organising land tenure and improving land cultivation.

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 2, p. 303.

The Congress of Soviets therefore aimed to set up agricultural credit to facilitate correct land tenure organisation. It charged the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the People's Commissariat of Agriculture with working out the fundamental law on land tenure and compiling a Code of Land Laws for the RSFSR, which would suit the transitional period and ensure the economic growth of the country: freedom to choose land tenure forms, permission to rent allotments and employ hired labour in peasant farms and security of land tenure. The Congress's decision saw that it was necessary to review land legislation in order to "make it fully accord with the foundations of the New Economic Policy and transform it into an orderly and clear code of land laws, that can be understood by every farmer..."

In accordance with the resolution of the Ninth Congress of Soviets, the new RSFSR Land Code was drawn up and passed at the Fourth Session of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee on 30 October 1922. The implementation of this code made all previous laws, either included in it or contradicting it, null and void. Consequently, the Land Socialisation Law also became invalid. The RSFSR Land Code was composed of fundamental laws, specifying the nature of land formation, and three interconnected sections: "Peasant Farming", "Town Lands and State Land Property" and "Land Tenure and Migration". Here we need only look at the first section, relating to the fundamental aspects of land tenure. The main drive in peasant land tenure was to ensure the transition from disorganised division of land to secure land tenure, adapted to the agricultural and everyday conditions of efficient peasant farming.

The Land Code legally reinforced the constant use by volosts, settlements and other agricultural communities of all those lands which were then in fact at their disposal and had been allotted to them by the resolutions of land organisations, or congresses of Soviets in volosts, uyezds and gubernias. Henceforth the exact equalisation of land between settlements and volosts was stopped. *In this way the RSFSR Land Code changed the nature and direction of land policy.*

Soviet power's first step in land relations was to eradicate private ownership of land and completely redistribute all lands on an equal basis according to labour and subsistence standards. Although even then the Party did not approve of the equalising principle, it nevertheless had to support it because the peasantry demanded it and because it was historically and economically necessary. However, while equalising divisions had been progres-

sive at the beginning of the revolution, in that they provided for the just distribution of land among landless and small peasants, they now hindered the future progress of agriculture and slowed down the development of its productive forces. Equalisation gave rise to much splitting up of peasant farms, and along with that constant division of land, economic instability and lack of security in land tenure.

The second step was to increase the economic efficiency of peasant farms, by putting a firm end to equalisation and to create stable tenure, suiting farming conditions of the lands, which had become the permanent property of the socialist state. This required halting the splitting up of peasant farms and frequent redivisions of land, in order to stimulate the peasants to make the best use of the land.

The transition to stable land tenure, of course, caused sharp conflicts. *Two opposing tendencies clashed: on the one hand, there was the tendency to further splitting up, which derived from the very nature of free land tenure; on the other, the tendency to economic stability, essential for the growth of agricultural productivity.* The struggle for the land now transferred itself into the lap of the peasantry. Land arguments within peasant communities, legal wrangles over land and other inner-community conflicts increased with unusual rapidity.

This is why the RSFSR Land Code provided for a whole series of measures, aimed at ensuring stable land tenure and protecting the rights of land tenants. The most important of these were: to define the legal rights to land; to halt inter-settlement and limit inner-settlement divisions and also to strengthen the right of tenants to actual land tenure; to speed up establishing the land tenure system; to provide legal protection of land tenure rights; to establish a fixed and clear method for examining land arguments.

*The Party's agrarian policy after the October Revolution was defined by two very important inter-related elements: firstly, creating conditions that would stimulate the growth of peasant farming and, secondly, observing strict class policy in the countryside.* Lenin had insisted on this indispensable condition even before the Revolution. "We must study the objective conditions of the peasant agrarian revolution in capitalistically developing Russia; on the basis of this objective analysis, we must separate the erroneous ideology of the different classes from the real content of the economic changes, and determine what, on the basis of those real

economic changes, is required for the development of the productive forces and for the proletarian class struggle."<sup>1</sup>

Here we see Lenin's detailed outline of how the Party's agrarian policy had to develop after the proletariat had gained power. Firstly it was essential to ensure the growth of productive forces in agriculture – "this highest criterion of social progress".<sup>2</sup> But it was impossible to stop at this within the Soviet system. Economic measures had to be very closely linked with the *class policy* in the countryside, in order to provide an indissoluble alliance between the proletariat and peasantry and obtain their support for the Party's economic policy.

*The RSFSR Land Code co-ordinated these two elements of Lenin's agrarian policy in the best possible way.* At a time when the vast majority of the peasantry had only extremely wasted and impoverished poor farms, it was first of all necessary to take care of the poorest part of the peasant population. Limited land lease and permitting hired labour proved to be one of the most effective methods of helping the poor. This measure was designed expressly in the interests of the poor peasantry.

Examining one of the important aspects of the new land tenure system – land lease and the employment of hired labour, the 11th Party Congress stated: "The Congress recommends all workers in any given sector not to hinder either the employment of hired labour or the lease of land in agriculture by excessive formalities. They should confine themselves to implementing the decisions of the last Congress of Soviets; they should also study which practical measures would be useful in curbing extremes and harmful exaggerations in the relations indicated."<sup>3</sup>

The main task was to utilise the land to a maximum in order to increase the productivity of peasant farms. But could this justify depriving the weak farms of the allotments which for various reasons they were unable to work? Such an action would have been a retreat from Leninist class positions. The Party could not achieve an increase in the productive forces of agriculture if it did not allow the poor peasants to lease out land in certain conditions.

The RSFSR Land Code therefore provided for land lease as a temporary transfer of land tenure rights which was permitted for working farms, weakened for the time being *either* as a result of

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907", *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> *CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions...*, Vol. 2, p. 334.

natural causes (harvest failure, fire, loss of cattle, etc.), or as a result of insufficiency or decline in manpower (short-term departures to earn money, mobilisation, etc.). Leasing was permitted only if the land was to be worked. Nobody could lease more land than he and his own family could work along with their own allotment. In order to prevent land falling into the hands of a few persons and the poorest strata becoming landless, and to protect the poor peasants from exploitation, all the duties and obligations incurred on the hirer's land had to be paid by the lease-holder.

The employment of hired labour, along with land leasing, was permitted for the poorest peasants and the temporarily weakened farms. Here again the conditions of hire were strictly limited. The employer could only hire labour when his own family continued to work, i. e. when the working members of the farm worked on an equal basis with the hired labour on the farm. Like leasing, hired labour could be employed without special formalities, without preliminary permission. The population concerned were responsible for ensuring that both procedures were correctly observed. All abuses were examined in land commissions, and the bodies of the People's Commissariat of Labour and trade unions protected the interests of the hired labourers.

*The class policy of the RSFSR Land Code protected the interests of the poorest peasantry, and was consistent with the aims of increasing the productive forces of agriculture.*

Forms of land tenure occupied an important place in the Land Code. The law allowed farmers complete freedom to choose land tenure forms.

Three forms of land tenure became widespread in the country: community, collective and separate farmstead land tenure. While it gave individual land tenure broad rights, the Code placed great emphasis on socialist forms of agriculture: state farms and collective farms, which were to become the basis for the social transformation of agriculture. By incorporating all aspects of land tenure and giving farmers maximum incentive to rehabilitate agriculture as rapidly as possible, the Code directed the peasantry at creating conditions for land communities to transfer to socialist forms of land tenure.

The Party Central Committee stressed the importance of the new land law and bound local Party organisations to make the peasant masses aware of it and to ensure that it was strictly implemented. "In explaining the new land laws," said the Central Committee's letter, "you must emphasise that they are intended to provide stability for those land tenure units which formed after the

October Revolution, in order to increase agricultural production. In promoting co-operative forms of land tenure as the forms which will ensure the development of the productive forces of the small private farm units, you must constantly stress that Soviet power gives peasants complete freedom to choose forms of land tenure."

The Party Central Committee directed rural Party organisations to be vigilant in establishing land tenure system, and strictly suppress any possible abuses and attempts on the part of the rich farmers, who would undoubtedly use land communities in their own class interests, to subjugate the poorest strata of the working peasants. The Central Committee bound Party organisations to ensure that lease agreements did not exceed the period fixed by the law, that lease agreements were registered in the volost executive committees, that leased land was not exploited and that employers observed the appropriate labour laws. *The main task was to gain possession of land communities and turn them into centres for the socialist transformation of agriculture.*

In this way, the passing of the RSFSR Land Code brought to a close the historical period of agrarian changes which Soviet power had begun from the moment of the October Revolution. The equalising principle of land tenure, put forward by the peasants during the agrarian revolution, had outlived its usefulness and was replaced by the principle of stable land tenure, which increased agricultural production to the maximum and facilitated the socialist development of the countryside.

## CHAPTER XV

### DEVELOPING SOCIALISED FARMING DURING THE FIRST PERIOD OF NEP

#### 1. PARTY POLICY OF PROMOTING CO-OPERATIVES

The October Socialist Revolution laid the foundations for developing a new type of co-operative movement in both exchange and production. For the first time the co-operative movement was entrusted with the historic task of transforming society on socialist principles. In no capitalist country could the co-operative movement understand that the class struggle was necessary to liberate the working masses politically and economically from the oppression of capitalists.

Only in Soviet conditions did the co-operative movement gain scope for economic and socio-political activity. In the grim years of the Civil War and foreign intervention, confronted with extreme difficulties, it played a major role in distributing provisions to the population. The Party rated its activity highly. The resolution of the 13th Congress of the RCP(B) stated: "At that time the co-operative movement acted as a distributor of provisions on the instructions of the state, and thereby rendered tremendous help in strengthening the workers' state."<sup>1</sup>

But the role of co-operatives was not, of course, confined to just supply and distribution. In practice they also showed the working people the great potential of uniting forces, the power of collectivism. The Party began organising the population into co-operatives on a mass scale, and built up a large body of activists, whom it involved in a conscious campaign to strengthen the Soviet state. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, the co-operative movement thus became, for the first time in its history, an active political force capable of fighting for the reconstruction of society on new, socialist principles.

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<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, Moscow, 1970, p. 68.



The position of co-operatives changed substantially with the ending of the Civil War and the transition to the New Economic Policy (NEP). The movement entered a new phase, where all forms of co-operation became much broader, more varied and significantly more complicated. The tasks of the co-operative movement in the new setting were exhaustively elaborated in the works of V. I. Lenin and formulated in decisions of Party conferences and congresses. In the period from the 10th to the 15th Party congresses the question of co-operatives was discussed at almost all Party congresses and conferences, showing the importance the Communist Party attached to the co-operative movement.

The 10th Party Congress instructed the Central Committee to work out practical measures to promote the co-operative movement in the conditions created by NEP. The 10th All-Russia Conference of the RCP(B) in May 1921, acting on the directions of the Congress, discussed co-operation as an integral part of NEP. In the new conditions, the co-operative movement was granted extensive rights. It changed from an apparatus distributing food into the basic apparatus of commodity circulation and Soviet trade. The Party Conference decreed that the bodies of the People's Food Commissariat (Narkomprod) should, on a contractual basis, transfer to co-operatives the functions of procurement and purchase, giving them the requisite stocks of goods for barter in pursuance of assignments set by the state. The decision of the Conference said: "to provide co-operatives with the requisite means for procurement of commodities and for the all-round development of local industry and promotion of economic activity in general."<sup>1</sup>

The 11th All-Russia Conference of the RCP(B) (December 1921), stated that extensive support should be given to the co-operative movement. Bearing in mind that famine in some parts of the country was causing increasing difficulties, the Conference stressed that it was essential to actively draw small-propertied and semi-proletarian elements into agricultural producer co-operatives, both to further organised mutual assistance in production and to unite them against any domination by kulak elements.

The 11th Party Congress (March-April 1922) devoted considerable attention to the co-operative movement. The Congress examined co-operation in the light of the new Party policy of regrouping class forces. The central questions, therefore, were those of strengthening Party guidance of the co-operative move-

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 268.

ment and extending its organising role among the peasant masses. The co-operative movement was also discussed at the 12th All-Russia Party Conference (August 1922).

The 11th Party Congress approved the resolution passed shortly before by a conference of secretaries of regional committees and bureaus and gubernia committees of the RCP(B) on Party work in co-operatives. The Congress decision stressed that "under the New Economic Policy all forms of co-operatives—consumer, artisan-productive and agricultural—have acquired great economic and political significance; all Party organisations must therefore devote extraordinary attention to, and intensify their work with them."<sup>1</sup>

As a practical measure, the Congress thought it advisable for gubernia and uyezd committees to hold regular weekly conferences on Party work in co-operatives. These conferences were to be chaired by the secretaries of gubernia and uyezd committees, with people experienced in co-operation participating. The Congress proposed that, apart from strengthening communist factions in elected bodies, Party organisations should organise Party cells in co-operative enterprises and offices, and in local productive co-operatives.

The Party Congress called the attention of rural Party organisations to the importance of instructing the peasantry in how to run farming co-operatives and of expanding cultural and educational work. Rural Communists were instructed to participate in agricultural co-operatives and collectives, and to gain experience in and knowledge of setting up and running co-operatives. With this aim, the Congress ordered "all Party organisations to ensure that within one year all rural Communists pass at least a short course in agriculture and agricultural co-operation".<sup>2</sup>

The exhaustive decision of the 13th Party Congress was the fundamental document providing guidelines for the development of the co-operative movement. The Congress, taking Lenin's co-operative plan as a basis, set concrete tasks for every form of co-operation in the setting of the country's economic growth. The Congress decision said: "Co-operation has never before anywhere been so tremendously and decisively important for socialist construction as after the victory of the proletariat over its class enemy, and especially in a country like Russia with its huge peasant small-scale farming, which can be led to socialism only by collective forms of organisation, i. e. by consumer and productive co-oper-

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 2, p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 335.

ation. Peasant farming organised in co-operatives, will inevitably lose its individualist character as it turns into collective farming. On the other hand, never before anywhere, in no capitalist country, has co-operation had such favourable conditions to develop as it has in the Soviet republics.”<sup>1</sup>

### *A. Increasing the Role of Consumer Co-operatives*

Under NEP, with the introduction of the tax in kind and the establishment of free commodity circulation, the role of consumer co-operatives was even more important than it had been during War Communism. Now consumer co-operatives had to help establish correct economic relations between the proletariat and the peasantry, and to help create a stable form of economic alliance between these two classes during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism.

With this political objective in mind, the Party concentrated primarily on organising and developing consumer co-operatives. The distinctive feature of these co-operatives was that the working class played an active part in them and thereby influenced peasants already involved in the co-operative movement. The 12th Party Conference (August 1922) stated that workers' co-operatives must not be separated from the general co-operative movement. “The working class, in carrying out the fundamental task of the revolution, that of leading the peasantry, must not form any isolated system of workers' co-operatives, and its class organisations must win decisive influence in consumer co-operation as a whole...”<sup>2</sup>

It was in consumer co-operatives that the mutual interests of the working class and the peasantry were best reflected. The shift of emphasis on consumer co-operation was necessitated, among other things, by the fact that with the introduction of free trade it was easy for private traders and money-lenders to try and take control of trade and organise goods exchange in their own, capitalist way. To avert this threat, consumer co-operatives had to be urgently transformed into the leading, organisational force in the whole goods exchange system.

The new conditions naturally made the work of consumer co-operation immeasurably more difficult. Under War Communism, consumer co-operation had purely distributive functions. It had

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 386.

been a body subordinate to Narkomprod and, under its control, distributed already procured provisions free of charge to the population. At that time co-operation was under the complete charge of the state. It had virtually no independence in financial, economic and purchasing activities, and performed a purely distributive function, carrying out the directives of the Soviet government to the letter.

Under NEP, consumer co-operation gained complete independence in all areas of trade, economic, financial and organisational activity. It could independently procure provisions, have subsidiary productive and processing enterprises, buy and sell products among consumers, have its own financial resources and productive and financial plans. For this, naturally, the co-operatives had to have their own finances, which they obtained primarily from their members as entrance fees and share payments. Consumer societies were therefore allowed to sell shares and collect fees, to raise loans from individuals and private organisations, and to enter into commercial transactions with all interested economic institutions.

In this way, NEP radically changed the nature and orientation of consumer co-operation. It had to change from a distributive mechanism into a well-coordinated body organising Soviet trade: trade that could out-compete the private merchant on the free market, oust him from the sphere of commodity trade and completely win over the mass of Soviet consumers.

Liquidating compulsory integration was an important measure for the entire co-operative system. As a result, not only consumer, but also agricultural, credit and producer co-operatives became completely independent and could form their own, independent centres of management. True, in the new conditions, the Party recommended that in the countryside integral co-operatives should be formed at first to unite agricultural, producer and credit co-operatives with the consumer societies. But this could only be done by voluntary consent.

Within a year of this new activity, consumer co-operatives managed to accumulate a minimal working capital. The turnover of Centrosoyus in September 1921 was 1 million, in October 3 million, in November 6 million and in December 16 million gold rubles. That was a big achievement for those times. This gradual accumulation of resources continued steadily in the succeeding years, but it was far too inadequate to successfully oppose the private trader, who quickly took the initiative and gained control of retail trade. He became particularly deeply ensconced in the countryside, which, in substance, fell into his hands.

Why was consumer co-operation, despite its considerable success, unable at first to oppose the private trader? There were many reasons, the most important of them being:

[*First,*] from the very start the managers of consumer co-operation made a grave mistake: they did not grasp the distinctive features of Soviet co-operation, and in practice followed the principles of the old bourgeois co-operation, especially in trading methods, being guided by the aim of gaining the maximum profit, instead of trying to sell working people the goods they needed as cheaply as possible. This so preoccupied many co-operative workers that they began to lose sight of the needs of the working people.

[*Second,*] from the very start consumer co-operation neglected the main consumer—the peasants. They concentrated on the towns, and turned to the countryside too late, while the private trader had first firmly established himself in villages. It is not surprising that the rural consumer fell into the hands of the trader and kulak. The growth of consumer societies was therefore extremely slow, and at times they even decreased in number.

[*Third,*] in their competition with the private trader, consumer co-operatives failed in the most important area—that of reducing prices. As a rule, co-operative goods were considerably more expensive than those of the private trader. Due to huge overheads and other difficulties, the price of co-operative goods became incredibly high by the time they reached the consumer. For example, the price of cotton rose from 18 to 38 kopecks, i. e., by 117 per cent; salt—from 13.5 kopecks to 2 rubles 26 kopecks, i. e., by 1,570 per cent; sugar from 3 rubles 45 kopecks to 11 rubles 26 kopecks, i. e., by 225 per cent; kerosene from 39 kopecks to 2 rubles 19 kopecks, i. e., by 646 per cent.

[*Fourth,*] obligatory membership of the citizens survived from War Communism for far too long, and slowed down the development of consumer co-operatives. As a result, the operation of consumer co-operatives extended to the whole population, thereby neglecting the interests of the organised shareholder. This egalitarian approach doubtless weakened consumer co-operation, and damaged it morally and materially. The absence of material incentives for shareholders led to the most undesirable results. This is why at the end of 1923 the Party set out to correct this abnormal situation.

The turning point came when consumer co-operation went over to voluntary membership with the obligatory payment of entry

fees and share payments by each member. In December 1923, the Central Executive Committee and the USSR Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) published the resolution "Reorganising Consumer Co-operation on the Principle of Voluntary Membership". The resolution abolished compulsory enrolment of citizens in integrated consumer societies and decreed that both entry into and withdrawal from them were voluntary.

The idea behind this measure was to abolish formal membership, which led to the passivity of the peasantry in developing co-operation, and to loss of stimulus for promoting co-operation in the countryside. Voluntary membership re-established Lenin's principle of giving co-operative members a material stake by linking them personally with the society of consumers and letting them invest their resources in co-operatives. The indispensable condition of membership, therefore, was payment of an entry fee and of a contribution.

The Party Central Committee's instructions to local Party organs on January 4, 1924, explained the significance of the shift to voluntary membership in co-operatives and required that the Party concentrate more attention on co-operation and on improving its guidance of co-operatives. "Due to the shift of co-operation to voluntary membership," said the Central Committee letter, "the Communist Party must increase to the maximum its influence in and management of co-operatives, reinforcing the influence of the proletariat in the general system, and especially in the local branches. All proletarian and semi-proletarian elements in town and country should actively participate in the development of co-operatives; all Party organisations must devote the maximum attention to the co-operative movement."

The shift from compulsory to voluntary membership was an important measure, which strengthened the financial position of rural consumer societies and gave them a more stable material and technical basis. But the measure also had a weakness. Compulsory membership without entry fees and contributions had opened the doors to everybody, including the poorest peasants. Now, fees and contributions prevented the very poor from joining co-operatives. This was a serious danger, for it meant that the prosperous kulak elements might take control, and give co-operation an alien class orientation.

In order to avert this danger, entry fees and contributions had to be fixed at levels that would not put co-operatives out of the reach of the poor peasantry. The decree, therefore, established an entry fee at 50 kopecks and a contribution of five rubles for the

poorest people. Besides, the payments could be made in instalments, and the appropriate credit was provided.

But the growing solidarity and unity of the workers and peasants, and their readiness to defend the gains of the Revolution, were the most powerful means of strengthening co-operatives and protecting class interests. The workers and peasants themselves had to do everything possible to isolate the kulaks and to augment their forces in the system of consumer co-operatives from top to bottom.

The 13th Party Congress (1924) was an important landmark in the development of co-operation. In connection with the economic crisis of 1923 the Party exposed shortcomings in the co-operative movement and showed how to remedy them. The Congress decision envisaged the immediate decentralisation of the organisational, trade, productive and credit activities of co-operatives, and provided for the maximum independence of local co-operatives and their local and district societies. Co-operative centres were to concentrate on organising local co-operatives.

By simplifying management and reducing overhead expenses, co-operatives were to sell their goods to the organised consumer at lower than average prices, rewarding him for his participation in co-operation, and combatting private trade. Therefore, co-operatives were to temporarily stop supplying all comers, and to concentrate on meeting the needs of their members, especially in the most essential goods.

The Congress decision indicated that it was necessary to promote co-operation by furthering the creative initiative and activity of co-operative members, encouraging the best co-operative workers, ensuring that co-operatives regularly presented their accounts to the membership, and organising inspections and instruction of the staffs of local co-operatives. The Congress again called on Party organisations to actively participate in the co-operative movement, explaining that, first, "the consolidation and growth of co-operation in the countryside is first and foremost a struggle to free the poor and middle peasants from various forms of dependence upon kulaks, profiteers and money-lenders. Second, encouraging the peasant masses to join co-operative activity is the simplest and the most comprehensible way for the peasant to learn collective farming."<sup>1</sup>

The task of co-operatives in the countryside was not only to provide the peasant farm with cheap goods and organise him as

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, p. 70.

a consumer, but also to organise him as a producer. Co-operation set about this dual task, aiming to advance agriculture and draw the working masses of the peasantry into building socialism. Nevertheless, the two objectives could not be identified. The Congress rejected as completely incorrect the policy of some local workers, who began to merge consumer and agricultural co-operatives into one organisational system. "The work to be done for both kinds of co-operation in the countryside is huge," stated the Congress decision. "We must first of all completely organise the peasant as a consumer and as producer, and only then think about unification..."<sup>1</sup>

### *B. Developing Agricultural and Credit Co-operatives*

Despite the huge role which consumer co-operatives were to play under NEP, agricultural co-operation held priority in radically re-organising the Soviet countryside. The classics of Marxism-Leninism had pointed out this leading role of co-operative production, and recommended that the working people should give it preference.

Agricultural co-operation found favourable conditions in Soviet Russia, liberated from the rule of capitalists and landowners. In turn, the working peasantry found its strength in co-operation. After the Revolution, farming had become more petty, scattered and dispersed. Peasant farms had not lost the qualities of farms producing for the market: first, they were consumer farms in that they were run to meet the needs of the peasant's family; second, they were working farms, run by the work of their owner and his family; third, they were commercial farms, and thus were influenced by the market. In these conditions, the peasant had, on the one hand, to develop and improve his farm, and, on the other, to avoid dependence on the kulak and money-lender. The facts therefore led the small producer to join co-operatives, which aimed at helping the peasant to develop his farm as efficiently as possible, and at helping him in his fight against kulak exploitation. The decision of the 13th Party Congress stated: "Only producers organised into co-operatives can fulfil the dual task facing the Party and Soviet power in the countryside: that of continuing to

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<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, p. 70.



increase agricultural production to the maximum, and at the same time of encouraging the small rural elements on an increasing scale to improve their farms and restrict the exploitative tendencies of the kulaks."<sup>1</sup>

But productive co-operatives had a third essential task: along with developing the productive forces in peasant farming, they had to direct them along the socialist channel. This was the main task of agricultural productive co-operation. Here again, the main opponent was the kulak, that rapacious money-lender and exploiter of the peasantry. The kulaks were capitalist entrepreneurs and at the same time representatives of usurious commercial capital which, as Marx wrote, "without revolutionising the mode of production ... only worsens the condition of the direct producers".<sup>2</sup>

Kulaks are economically reactionary in that they destroy the productive forces by mercilessly exploiting and ruining the peasantry. Conserving the old mode of production and trying to live with the old, medieval forms of economy, they formed a class which found any progressive forward movement unprofitable. They not only endangered the socialist transformation of the countryside, but also hindered economic progress and the progressive development of the productive forces. This made it essential to decisively combat the kulaks.

However, under NEP restrictions and administrative compulsion could not be used to fight the kulaks and money-lenders, for that would only aggravate the already difficult situation of the country. Therefore, said Lenin, they had to be fought not with bans and restrictions, but with better, more advanced methods of management, with measures that united the peasantry. Moreover, the Soviet state had enough resources to render the kulaks politically harmless and draw the peasantry into socialist development.

Agricultural producer co-operatives were a powerful means for the state to influence the peasantry. They were directed to preparing the conditions for the emergence of new collective forms of farming, putting it on a socialist foundation. The Party never overestimated the role and place of the small farm as a producer of marketable produce. It saw the small farm as a transitional form, because "proprietaryship of land parcels by its very nature excludes the development of socialist productive forces of labour, social forms of labour, social concentration of capital, large-scale

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, pp. 334-35.

cattle-raising, and the progressive application of science".<sup>1</sup> This form of property led to "an infinite fragmentation of means of production, and isolation of the producers themselves. Monstrous waste of human energy. Progressive deterioration of conditions of production and increased prices of means of production—an inevitable law of proprietorship of parcels."<sup>2</sup>

Still, the Party held that small peasant farming was historically inevitable in the transitional period from capitalism to socialism, that it could be neither abolished nor prohibited, and that for a certain time it was natural for it to exist. Here again co-operation had to play an extremely progressive role. Lenin pointed out the exceptional importance of co-operative societies, "first, from the standpoint of principle (the means of production are owned by the state), and, second, from the standpoint of transition to the new system by means that are the *simplest, easiest and most acceptable to the peasant*".<sup>3</sup> Lenin went on to say: "It is one thing to draw up fantastic plans for building socialism through all sorts of workers' associations, and quite another to learn to build socialism in practice in such a way that *every* small peasant could take part in it. That is the very stage we have now reached."<sup>4</sup>

The conditions for agricultural co-operation in the countryside were very favourable, especially in view of the "human material"—the poor peasants. This stratum had now changed completely. The former downtrodden and submissive poor peasant had long since disappeared. The Soviet peasants had been schooled by class struggle and serious trials. They were primarily former soldiers and Red Army men, members of the Poor Peasants' committees and former war prisoners, who were very responsive to everything new. They were generally active, and especially so in seeking new forms and trying to put an end to the old. They had a tremendous craving for the new life; they burned with hatred of the age-old backwardness, of all old, obsolete forces. Consequently, all the objective and subjective requisites for developing agricultural co-operation existed. Everything now depended on the scope of the measures taken by the state, and on the correct approach of the Party.

Agricultural co-operation took a new lease of life the moment it was separated from consumer co-operation. The decree of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's

<sup>1</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 807.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "On Co-operation", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 468.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

Commissars of August 16, 1921, contained important guidelines on rehabilitating and developing agricultural co-operation. It outlined the structure of agricultural co-operation from top to bottom. The All-Russia Union of Agricultural Co-operatives—Selskosoюз—was formed on the basis of this decree. District and regional agricultural unions were also set up. An orderly system for setting up and managing agricultural co-operatives was established. The first All-Russia Congress of delegates from agricultural co-operative unions was held in August 1921. It approved the government decree, and stated that it was essential to establish an All-Russia Union of Agricultural Co-operatives, which would unite and service all fields of co-operation in agriculture.

The benefits of this re-organisation made themselves felt within the second year. In 1924, Selskosoюз embraced 234 regional, gubernia and uyezds agricultural unions, comprising 17,642 local co-operatives with a total of 1,040,977 members. The number of local agricultural co-operatives grew so rapidly that the system of local unions could no longer bring the entire local co-operative network under its control. Only about 56 per cent of the local co-operatives were embraced by the unions (only 17,642 out of 31,507).

Agricultural co-operation grew much faster than the other types. Following pertinent action, agricultural co-operation spread among the peasantry, especially in the central area of the RSFSR, from 1922 on. Here is what the network of agricultural co-operatives looked like (see p. 464):<sup>1</sup>

Although mixed co-operatives (agricultural and artisan-producer) were in the majority, they were primarily agricultural in character. At that time a lively discussion was underway in the press whether co-operatives should be integral or specialised. However, the discussion was of a rather academic nature, while matters took their natural course. As the economic life of the country revived and production increased, co-operation split up more and more into specialised branches, shaking off general, all-embracing functions.

Agricultural co-operation gained control of branch after branch, changing them noticeably and thereby greatly influencing the peasant masses. It not only facilitated a steady growth of peasant farms, but also directly introduced them to new forms of management, to co-operation and joint labour.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Otchet NKZ RSFSR za 1923-1924 g.* (Account of the National Agricultural Committee of the RSFSR for 1923-24), p. 74 (in Russian).

Type of agricultural co-operatives	Number of co-operatives	
	0 923	0 924
Productive co-operatives: communes and joint farming associations	9 20	0 22
2 Subsidiary producer co-operatives (equipment and improvement of husbandry, etc.)	576	3 5 6
3 Co-operatives for marketing and processing of agricultural products (milk, butter, fruit, vegetables, etc.)	3 54	4 336
4 Agricultural mixed and credit associations	8 369	3 369
5 Agricultural societies	2 2	64
Total	22 899	3 507

Agricultural co-operation did much to promote Lenin's ideas about rural electrification. Co-operatives helped to build and operate the early rural power stations.

Setting up credit co-operatives was the most difficult of the co-operative movement in the Soviet countryside. They began to function independently only from 1923 onwards. This was due not only to the tremendous difficulties of the post-war period, but also to some specific features of its history. Although credit co-operatives had existed in great number before the Revolution, they could not properly develop their credit functions. During the First World War they undertook immediate emergency operations in agriculture, thereby merging to a great extent with the agricultural co-operatives. During the Revolution and the Civil War they were even unable to develop their credit activity and acted as middlemen in small-scale transactions.

Under NEP, credit co-operatives were faced with special difficulties. This was natural, because to expand they needed a stable monetary system and a normal network of state credit institutions. Unfortunately, state finance and credit, and commodity circulation, were in a state of confusion. Credit co-operatives were therefore the last to establish themselves.

The governmental decree of January 24, 1922, defined the place of credit co-operation and its tasks under NEP. The decree stated that credit co-operative associations were to help the small peasant producer by offering their members loans on favourable terms. Credit associations were to facilitate a more balanced and efficient amalgamation of the financial resources of their individual members in order to carry out large-scale projects for improving agricultural production. Credit co-operatives were authorised to conduct a variety of financial operations: investment, loan, mortgaging, intermediate trade, and commission operations. Credit co-operatives obtained resources from entry fees, contributions, deposits, advances, loans from departments and individuals, profits from operations, and credit from the state.

Membership in credit co-operatives was purely voluntary. The only condition was that each credit co-operative should have at least 50 members. This provision was to prevent the emergence of co-operatives that were too small and unviable, on the one hand, and, on the other, to prevent secret banks from being formed under the guise of co-operatives, which would enslave, rather than help, the peasants. By law, credit associations could amalgamate into unions of not less than three associations. Credit unions and co-operatives were formed in volosts, uyezds and gubernias; they had their own regulations and were independent. General supervision was entrusted to the People's Financial Commissariat (Narkomfin) and the People's Agricultural Commissariat (Narkomzem). Credit associations, whose range of operation did not exceed the uyezd, could be formed without preliminary permission and were registered in the financial departments of offices of the State Bank. In all other cases, the permission of the gubernia executive committee or of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee was needed, depending on the scale of their activity.

One detail is important here: there were two kinds of credit co-operatives—loan and savings associations and credit associations—along the lines of the prerevolutionary co-operatives. This step did not yield the expected results. The loan and savings associations were handy places for kulaks and money-lenders to operate in,

and they used them to gain control over people. It is not surprising that they later collapsed.

Of course, credit co-operatives had a political, as well as economic, significance: providing peasants with cheap and favourable credit was the best possible way of establishing a link between state organs and scattered peasant farms. Therefore, "agricultural credit should occupy a central place in the Party's measures to strengthen the link between town and country".<sup>1</sup>

The Communist Party took measures to organise extensive state and co-operative credit in order to bridle the kulaks, profiteers and money-lenders who had gained control of credit and were using it to enslave the peasantry. The 13th Congress approved the decision of the 13th Party Conference to strengthen agricultural credit co-operatives, extend their functions and give them the right to independently attract funds from the population, and to give loans to the poor and middle peasants. The Soviet Government opened the Central Agricultural Bank, which it gave the appropriate funds.

The Party held that only a skilful combination of state and peasant resources could expand the sphere of economic activity and thereby ease the extremely difficult position of the poor and middle peasants, and of the whole state. "A ramified system of agricultural credit," said the decision of the 13th Congress, "reinforced by allocations of funds by the Central Agricultural Bank through agricultural credit societies and through productive and credit co-operatives, especially at local level, to peasant farms will be one of the most powerful ways for the Party to regulate the rehabilitation of agriculture and provide more concrete support for the poor and middle peasants."<sup>2</sup> As a result of these joint efforts, credit co-operatives began to make rapid progress. In two years, the number of credit co-operatives increased by more than 500 per cent. On July 1, 1922, there were 616 co-operatives, on January 1, 1923, there were 799, on July 1, 1923-2,788, and on January 1, 1924-3,850 co-operatives.

An important landmark in the history of agricultural co-operation was the Party and Government decision to amalgamate it with collective farms under the general guidance of co-operative unions, with a single centre of management. This measure was based on the decision of the 12th All-Russia Party Conference,

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<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

which stated that it was desirable "in the nearest possible future to merge organisationally collective farm amalgamations with general agricultural cooperation".<sup>1</sup> Merging these two similar peasant associations under one management strengthened their organisation and close economic co-operation. Of course, the aim was not to merge them into single farms, or dissolve some farms in others. The purpose of united control was to increase the influence of collective farming and ensure that agricultural co-operation developed along socialist lines by means of united control.

The 14th Party Conference (April 1925) examined the development of the co-operative movement from the point of view of organising the peasantry *en masse* into co-operative groups. Its decisions, later approved by the 14th Party Congress, laid special emphasis on expanding producer co-operatives among the peasantry. Among all the measures aimed at increasing the peasantry's participation in economic construction, "the main place should belong to the organisational and economic reinforcement and development of agricultural and credit co-operatives".<sup>2</sup> The following priorities lay before agricultural and credit co-operation: organising co-operative credit; organising the processing and sale of agricultural products as marketable output increased; developing all possible forms of collective agriculture; providing the broad mass of the peasantry with the means of production.

The whole system of agricultural co-operation, while a single organisation uniting the peasant masses, had to follow two courses: forming special agricultural associations, on the one hand, and agricultural credit associations, on the other. The Party knew that agricultural credit associations had become much stronger organisationally and economically: in their credit work they were independent bodies headed by the Central Agricultural Bank; in marketing, supply and production they were part of the system of agricultural co-operation.

The Party Conference stated that "agricultural and credit co-operation must concentrate particularly on organising agricultural credit, marketing, supply and processing of farm produce, because in this way it can advance to real and direct co-operation of the mass of peasants. Agricultural credit co-operation should also come to the aid of the mass of semi-ruined peasants, who have no horses, and help them get on their feet, in particular by organising

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<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 2, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 193-94.

artels, agricultural associations, collective farms, communes, and other forms of collectively organised agricultural labour and production.<sup>1</sup>

The decisions of the 14th Conference enabled the Communist Party to remove shortcomings in the building of co-operation and adapt co-operatives to the new conditions. All forms of co-operation, especially agricultural and credit, grew very rapidly. From January I, 1924 to July I, 1925, the number of peasant farms involved in agricultural co-operation increased from 1,740,000 to five million, i. e., by almost 200 per cent; more than 90 per cent of these farms belonged to poor and middle peasants.

Once the Communist Party had succeeded in rehabilitating socialist industry, the role of co-operation grew incalculably in the new conditions of economic construction. Co-operation was to enable the Party in the near future to merge industry and agriculture in an integrated socialist economic system, and ensure undivided supremacy of the socialist mode of production in the entire economy.

## 2. STRENGTH OF THE COLLECTIVE FARM SYSTEM TESTED BY HISTORY

When he developed Marx's ideas on the socialist re-organisation of agriculture, V. I. Lenin emphasised the significance of the internal pattern of socialised farming, the need to find the right forms of management, and establish truly socialist methods of organisation, accounting and remuneration. Central attention was called to rigid observance of the socialist principles of material stimulation of peasants to expand collective agricultural production, and to blending the peasants' personal interests with those of the state.

Lenin gave building socialism in practice the main role in solving this complex problem. He stressed that Marxist theory provided nothing but the basic ideas on how to transform agriculture along socialist lines. But how these ideas will materialise, at what rate and through what transitional stages the re-organisation would proceed, the form of socialised farming best suited to meet the production targets—the answers to all these questions could not be presented on a silver platter. They would be forthcoming in

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 192-93.



the course of historical development, from the actual experience of the masses. When power was seized in the state and re-organisation was begun on socialist lines, "we could not know the forms of transformation, or the rate of development of the concrete re-organisation. Collective experience, the experience of millions can alone give us decisive guidance in this respect...."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin severely attacked all hare-brained schemes and inventions in the choice of organisational forms. He called for close study of the practical experience of the masses, and its verification and skilled use. "...No sensible socialist who has ever written on the prospects of the future ever even thought that we could immediately establish and compose the forms of organisation of the new society according to some predetermined instruction and at one stroke."<sup>2</sup>

The Party approach to the collectivisation of the countryside followed Lenin's instruction that co-operative unions have many forms, developing from the lowest to the highest, and spreading gradually from the field of distribution to that of production. The task of the Party was to determine on the strength of the constructive experience of the masses which form of productive co-operative would best blend the personal interests of the peasant with the interests of society, and best ensure a steady growth of agricultural production.

The growth of the co-operative movement helped the Party to find this mutually acceptable form of socialised farming: the agricultural *artel*. But before this form took root as the foundation of socialised farming, it passed through many stages of development and was subjected to thorough testing.

The agricultural commune, which had been the starting point in the socialist development of the countryside, was fairly widespread in the initial stage of collective farming in the USSR. In the setting of economic dislocation at the time of the Civil War, famine and ruin, the agricultural communes had played a positive role. But as the country moved towards peaceful economic construction the internal weakness of the communes became more and more apparent. These first socialist farms were more like communities than large agricultural enterprises. Even then Lenin noted that consumerist and parasitical attitudes were appearing in the communes and these were seriously slowing down the expansion of

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Speech at the First Congress of Economic Councils, May 26, 1918", *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 410.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

socialised farming. These fundamental faults subsequently led to the collapse of many communes.

Communes were founded on a backward material and technical basis and were based on principles of equal consumption; they could therefore not really improve labour productivity, nor become the major form. This is why later communes began to decline, while agricultural artels and associations for joint tilling of land began to increase rapidly. These latter were more comprehensible to the peasant masses and suited the material and technical basis. By the end of 1921, 12,529 out of the 15,569 collective farms of all kinds, i. e. three-quarters, were artels and associations.

Under NEP associations for joint tilling of land were popular, and they played a progressive role at a certain stage in the co-operative movement. But they were only a temporary, transitional form, as they could not radically re-structure the small peasant farm, for the basic means of production remained the private property of the members of the co-operative associations.

The Party had supporters of both the highest form of collective farming, and the very lowest. Some tried to promote communes, without taking account of the economic requirements of social development, others tried to perpetuate the simplest semi-socialist forms of collective agriculture. The Party opposed equally those who ignored objective natural economic development and tried to run ahead, thereby disorienting the masses, and those who tried to contain the co-operative movement within the lowest forms, restricting them to the narrow confines of trade, marketing and mediation.

Creatively expanding and enriching Lenin's theory of organising socialist co-operation, the Party made a profound study of historical processes, drawing conclusions from the practical experience of the masses. This led it to discover the artel form of collective farm, which was capable of ensuring growth of production and meeting the demand of the working people. True, at that time, this form of farm was only just finding its feet. At first agricultural artels had some faults. Wage-levelling and absence of personal responsibility flourished in them; there was no planning, rate-setting or registration of labour. Distribution of joint incomes depended in some artels on the contributions paid by the individual peasants when they joined the collective farm, in others, it depended on the number of heads in the family, and in others on the length of time spent at work, regardless of what had been done or how. Obviously, this method of registration and payment could not stimulate labour, or increase the incentive of the collective workers.

Nevertheless, it was still the most efficient form, heralding a great future.

NEP influenced the development of collective agriculture in two ways. Firstly, many peasants left collectivised farms, and some agricultural collectives even collapsed. Secondly, NEP was a great test of the vitality of the collective farm in agriculture, of the correctness of the Marxist-Leninist theory that the victory of the new socialist path in the countryside was inevitable. Here we will examine what processes the collective farms went through in this difficult period.

The special feature of their development in the first period of NEP was that they improved their internal organisational and economic activity, not that they increased in number. While in the first years of the Revolution, until the first half of 1921, collective farms grew rapidly in number, after that, until the second half of 1924, the number of these farms declined, as the data given below show.

Trends in the Number of Agricultural Collectives

Agricultural collectives	USSR (excluding the Ukraine)					In 50 gubernias	
	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1/10/1923	1/10/1924
Agricultural communes . .	950	1,961	1,862	3,040	1,448	1,156	1,318
Agricultural artels . . . . .	—	3,606	7,722	10,491	6,639	5,710	6,167
Associations for joint tilling of land . . . . .	—	622	886	2,039	3,941	2,335	2,637
Total. . . . .	950	6,189	10,470	15,570	12,028	9,201	10,122

The table not only shows the state of all forms of collective construction, but also how they developed. Although the number of collective farms decreased, this does not mean that they were weak, as the collectives that collapsed were those that had been built on an unstable socio-economic basis. For example, many of the collectives that collapsed had been composed of industrial

workers, who returned to the factories with the rehabilitation of industry; others were collectives which consumed all that they produced, etc.

The main point is that, during these years, collective farms greatly developed their organisational and farming skills, gained much experience, brought their internal structure close to socialist principles and in many cases were model examples of how to build the new life in the countryside. All three forms of socialised farming were now tested. Although all three survived the difficult period of NEP, the most simple farm forms were the most persistent. The data below show that the evolution of collective farms was in favour of the associations for joint tilling of land.

Percentage Relationship of the Number of Each Form  
to the Total Number for 1921 and 1924

Communes . . . . .	19.7	13.0
Artels . . . . .	64.4	60.9
Associations . . . . .	15.9	26.1
Total . . . . .	100	100

These figures show that co-operative construction had embarked upon a normal course of development, which was very important for its future.

The following are the reasons why peasants left collective farms, and why these decreased in number.

Firstly, many newly-formed collective farms with no experience in organisation and management could not re-organise themselves and adapt to the new conditions of NEP. They could not cope with the changes in farming conditions, and confronted by great difficulties they began to collapse.

Secondly, the mass return to the town of the workers, with the recovery of industry, undoubtedly had an effect on the state of the collective farms. They lost a strong proletarian nucleus and could not survive the difficulties.

Thirdly, a harmful kulak influence led to many peasants leaving collectives, and to the collapse of the weakest of these.

Fourthly, with the growth of agricultural co-operation, collective farms became part of its system and adopted the simplest forms of co-operative unions. At the same time many small collecti-

ves were merged into larger farms, capable of using improved agricultural implements and introducing advanced scientific methods. This also greatly reduced the number of collective farms.

Fifthly and lastly, NEP helped the middle peasants who wanted to manage their individual farms independently. As Soviet power encouraged personal initiative, the middle peasants acquired individual farms and attempted to improve and consolidate them.

But none of this means that the decline in number of collective farms can be seen as a decline in the movement. On the contrary, in the country as a whole the process of collectivisation moved steadily forward, despite all the difficulties and obstacles.

Collective farms of this period differed in two ways from collectives of the first period.

Firstly, most of the new agricultural collectives were built on allotted land. This was important, as it opened the way for building collective farms in the future. Data, showing on what land collective farms were built, are given below.<sup>1</sup>

Agricultural collectives	Percentage relationship of the number of collective farms formed on	
	state lands	communally worked lands
Communes . . . . .	55.91	44.09
Artels . . . . .	45.00	55.00
Associations . . . . .	37.84	62.16

Secondly, the social composition of collective farms changed drastically: they were now made up primarily of peasant farmers. The proportion of town workers was insignificant. This also shows that the principles of collectivism had been largely accepted by the peasant masses.

In the first years of NEP, the nature of collective farms changed: they became stronger and more stable, increasingly attracting the poor and middle peasants. Collective farms and agricultural co-operative unions gradually increased their forces and

<sup>1</sup> See: *Account of the National Agricultural Committee of the RSFSR for 1923-1924*, p. 80.

became stable centres of socialism in the countryside, steadily paving the way for the development of agriculture. Collective farms began to introduce radical changes in crop rotation, to improve land cultivation and to employ large-scale crop rotation. This shows that collective farm management had improved, and that these farms were superior to individual peasant farms. According to data, in 1925, 51 per cent of all collective farms in the RSFSR had introduced large-scale crop rotation; a year later the number of these farms had increased to 61.5 per cent. The data below show the essential collapse of the old system of agriculture.

Agricultural collectives	Three-field farms	Many-field farms
	in %	
Communes . . . . .	16.3	83.7
Associations for joint tilling of land . . . . .	44.4	55.6
Agricultural artels . . . . .	48.4	51.6
Collective farms (on average)	38.5	61.5

Many of the collective farms began to use high-quality seed.

The advantages of collective farms were shown particularly in the transition to more intensive agriculture. The relationship of crops sown in the Ukraine (in percentages) shows this:<sup>1</sup>

	Grain	Root and tuber crops	Industrial grain	Legumes	Oil-producing crops	Melons and vegetables	Fodder
Collective farms	63.9	9.1	10.0	4.5	7.5	2.1	2.9
Peasant farms	87.2	7.0	1.3	—	2.5	1.0	1.0

The table shows that the structure of cultivated land in the collective farms was far superior to that in individual peasant farms.

<sup>1</sup> See: *On the New Path*, Issue 5, Part I, p. 640.

These advantages also told in crop fields, as the table below shows (in poods per dessiatine):<sup>1</sup>

	Rye	Winter wheat	Spring wheat	Barley	Oats	Buck-wheat	Millet	Maize
Collective farms	106.26	116.0	58.0	94.0	100.4	28.3	120.0	99.2
Peasant farms	79.20	81.1	67.3	75.0	68.8	50.9	67.9	98.4

These figures also show the superiority of collective farms. The deviation in the indices for two crops—spring wheat and buck-wheat—does not change the overall conclusion on the value of socialised farms.

Finally, the last and perhaps the most important indicator of the superiority of collective farms is the income from one dessiatine. In collective farms it was 124 rubles, while in individual peasant farms it was a mere 97 rubles. The data given above for the RSFSR and the Ukraine were typical of collective farms throughout the country.

The progress made each year increased the authority of the collective farms among the broad masses of the peasantry. It was impossible to ignore these new centres of socialism in the countryside. Communards and collectivists became the most respected people in the villages. They always helped the peasant, gave him advice and rescued him from difficult situations. Collective farms had come to occupy the first place; they were bright lights of the new life.

### 3. SURMOUNTING THE DIFFICULTIES IN SOVKHOZ CONSTRUCTION

The socialist types of farm had to adapt to the new economic conditions, and withstand the difficulties that these entailed. The sovkhozes (state farms) suffered most acutely of them all in the first years of NEP and went through complex processes. The land-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

owners' estates, on which the sovkhoses formed, had been greatly destroyed during the Civil War and the Revolution. State resources were, moreover, negligible.

Many different departments controlled the sovkhoses, and the lack of a single central management made the situation worse. It is enough to say that more than 17 state organs owned sovkhoses.

Often sovkhoses were transferred several times from one department to another and this led to many of them collapsing. During the Civil War each department had tried to acquire at least one sovkhos, in order to provide its workers with food. Under NEP, when these farms had to be rehabilitated and developed, the departments would have been quite happy to get rid of them. Sovkhoses needed skilled and thrifty farm management, and capital input.

The sovkhoses were so desperately in need of equipment, finances and manpower, that they did not even have the minimum of resources to expand. Neither could the state subsidise them out of its budget.

Due to the great difficulties caused by the transition to NEP, detrimental and extremely dangerous sentiment to liquidate the sovkhoses as unviable and seemingly unable to justify their existence, surfaced in many areas. The Trotskyites and all types of Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary professors generated them.

But despite the difficulties, the Party continued to strengthen the agricultural organisation of the former sovkhoses and to create new ones on state-owned land. Lenin had set the example for this. When the first anti-sovkhos moves were made, he played an ardent part in setting up the Lesniye Polyany (Forest Groves) Sovkhos. In his reminiscences, V. D. Bonch-Bruyevich describes his conversation with Lenin, which shows how intently he watched over sovkhos construction and how deeply he believed in the inevitable victory of this form of farming.<sup>1</sup>

The Central Committee of the Party and the Government rejected the Trotskyite and Socialist-Revolutionary idea of liquidating sovkhoses, and took measures to strengthen their agricultural organisation. The most important of these was to amalgamate the sovkhoses and establish a more orderly system of managing them. The first step was to amalgamate sovkhoses on a gubernia scale into gubernia agricultural trusts and to make

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<sup>1</sup> See: V. D. Bonch-Bruyevich, *Lenin i sovkhos "Lesniye Polyany"* (Lenin and the State Farm Lesniye Polyany), Moscow, 1957, pp. 33-34 (in Russian).



them self-supporting. These organisational changes began in January 1922. The State Agricultural Syndicate (Gosselsindikát), a state trading and industrial organ, was set up to coordinate the gubernia agricultural trusts.

Organising sovkhozes into trusts was the first step towards firmly establishing them. Special sovkhoz trusts were also created: the Sugar Trust, Wine Syndicate, etc.

A major government measure in 1922 was to transfer to the sovkhozes all subsidiary industrial enterprises (mills, creameries, millet-processing and wool-carding establishments), which had previously been controlled by various departments.

Sovkhozes were then allowed to undertake trade. Gosselsindikát could independently conclude trade deals; it had its own commercial stores, independently sold what it produced and bought what the sovkhozes needed. In the 1923/24 financial year Gosselsindikát made 3,789,862 rubles. As government credit was meagre, these trading operations and the profits obtained by the subsidiary industrial enterprises helped the sovkhozes to build up resources and withstand the financial difficulties.

Despite all the constant aid and attention of the Soviet Government, the material basis of the sovkhozes was still very weak. During 1922 and 1923 they made a loss of three million rubles. These two years were the most difficult for sovkhoz construction. Sovkhozes could use only 59 per cent of their arable land. Only 43.6 per cent of the draught animals and 15 per cent of other requisite resources were available.

In 1924 the Soviet Government began to increase credit for sovkhozes and to provide them with the necessary material and technical equipment. The 13th Party Congress and its decision to expand agricultural credit played a great part in this. When the Central Agricultural Bank was set up, sovkhozes were allowed to receive credit, although only in small amounts. They were provided with more and better implements and agricultural machinery. By 1924 the sovkhozes in Gosselsindikát already had 313 tractors with all the appropriate machinery, their own repair work-shops, forges and agricultural stores.

All this allowed sovkhozes to improve their financial and trading activity. Basic data on Gosselsindikát sovkhozes show this. In comparison with 1923, sovkhoz land was used in the following way (in hectares)<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Account of the National Agricultural Committee of the RSFSR for 1923-1924*, p. 614.

Year	No. of farms	Arable lands	Meadows	Pasture	Gardens and orchards	Forest and shrub	Estates	Land total
1923	939	418,706	155,167	123,116	16,299	49,617	11,220	838,202
1924	796	420,017	166,618	145,954	14,171	46,879	12,042	888,470

The data show that the sovkhoses were gradually increasing their development. The reduction in the number of sovkhoses in no way weakened their progress. Other data on livestock production also show this tendency.<sup>1</sup>

Year	Horses	Cattle	Pigs	Sheep	Camels	Poultry	Beehives
1923	17,667	41,401	14,024	76,265	305	9,081	7,091
1924	22,015	40,966	20,967	104,084	345	15,324	8,639
1925	24,063	45,841	33,463	123,670	354	18,455	10,226

In the economic year 1924 Gosselsindikat completely repaid its debts and made a profit of 2,726 rubles. This profit, although small, was very significant for those times. It inspired confidence in the viability of the system, and demonstrated the efficiency of self-supporting farming. In the last year sovkhoses had improved their farming considerably, and in doing so turned into stable centres of socialist construction in the countryside.

The sovkhoses began producing improved high-quality seed and pedigree livestock on a large scale. This was the real farming achievement of the sovkhoses. Their agricultural assistance to peasant farms was invaluable.

The sovkhoses became cultural centres in the countryside. They established for those times a fair number of educational establishments: 132 libraries and reading rooms, 51 clubs, 78 primary and secondary schools. There were many schools working to eliminate

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

illiteracy and various kinds of educational circles. It was very important that a genuine agricultural working class formed in the sovkhozes, a stable source of support for Soviet power.

Soviet farms surmounted the great difficulties of the first period of NEP and entered on a new phase of productive activity. The sovkhozes, co-operative associations and collective farms were a great economic, moral and political force, capable of paving the way for the victorious development of socialist agriculture.

## CHAPTER XVI

# STRENGTHENING THE ALLIANCE OF THE WORKING CLASS AND THE PEASANTRY AS THE MAIN CONDITION FOR THE SOCIALIST DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

## 1. THE EFFICACY OF LENIN'S PRINCIPLES OF FARM MANAGEMENT AND DECISIVE SHIFTS IN SOVIET AGRICULTURE

Lenin's flexible yet consistent agrarian policy found the quickest way to revive Soviet agriculture. The vital force of this policy was that it completely embodied Lenin's ideas on socialist farming, based on the unchanging principles of providing moral and material incentives for the peasantry to develop agriculture and combine state and individual interests. This is why the peasants understood and accepted this policy, and wholeheartedly supported it.

The many measures introduced by Soviet power to encourage agricultural production gave rise to unprecedented farming activity and constructive initiative among the peasant masses. Despite the tremendous ruin and devastation, the peasantry was capable of so much strength, skill, persistence and desire, that in the first three years of NEP it had essentially eliminated all the serious faults in agricultural economy.

By 1923 the Soviet peasantry had reached a true turning point in the life of the countryside. This was the first result of Lenin's agrarian policy, which the Party put into practice through its untiring organisational work among the peasant masses. Although Party organisations in the villages were very small, they drew the progressive forces of the intelligentsia into active constructive work and conducted extensive educational work to promote scientific farming among the peasantry.

At that time this was the primary task of rural Party organisations. Back in 1920, at the Eighth Congress of Soviets, Lenin said that, after the victorious Civil War, the main task was "war on the relics of inertness, ignorance and mistrust that prevail among the peasant masses. We shall achieve nothing by the old methods, but we shall achieve victory by the methods of propaganda, agitation and organised influence which we have learnt".<sup>1</sup> He called on the Party to "bring more engineers and agronomists to the

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "The Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets", *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 505.

fore, learn from them, keep an eye on their work and turn our congresses and conferences not into propaganda meetings but into bodies that will verify our economic achievements, bodies in which we can really learn the business of economic development"<sup>1</sup>

Although he was gravely ill, Lenin took a constant interest in promoting and introducing agricultural methods among the peasantry. He steadfastly pointed the Party towards increasing organisational forces in the countryside and mobilising them to overcome the agricultural backwardness of the peasantry. The Party faithfully followed Lenin's course. Considerable work was done during 1921-1922, despite ruin and famine. The Party now had incomparably greater organisational forces and capabilities.

Rural Party cells were a stable centre for the Party in the countryside. Official data record that by the beginning of 1924, there were more than 14,000 Party cells in the countryside (56.9 per cent of the total number).<sup>2</sup> The Party had many active members in the countryside, had gained suitable experience, and could now conduct extensive agricultural and political work in the countryside.

We should note the mass nature of these measures and the varied organisational forms they took. They included: mass courses and lectures, agricultural conferences and exhibitions, good harvest competitions, advice centres, mobile libraries, peasant excursions to experimental farms and sovkhozes, special trains carrying agricultural experts, etc. These were all employed on a mass scale.

Figures show how great the work undertaken was. According to data from 40 gubernias, in 1923-1924 more than 3.5 million peasants were instructed in advanced agricultural methods, i.e., more than double the number in 1922-1923. In the same gubernias there were more than 1,500 agricultural courses, which 125,847 people attended, 120,716 conferences and lectures with 2,789,000 peasants participating, and 753 local agricultural exhibitions were organised.<sup>3</sup> More than 1,380,000 people visited the first All-Russia Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow in 1923 alone.

Experimental scientific departments, central organisational points for the peasants, were playing an ever more prominent role in promoting advanced agricultural methods. In 1924 in the RSFSR there were 109 experimental stations, which involved more

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 514.

<sup>2</sup> See: *RKP(B) v tsifrakh* (The RCP(B) in Figures), 2nd Issue, 1924, pp. 6, 13.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Account of the National Agricultural Committee of the RSFSR for 1923-1924*, p. 171.

than 6,500 peasant farms in experimental work. And these drew in hundreds of thousands of other farms. According to data from 26 scientific stations, more than 77,000 peasants visited the exhibitions that they organised. The experimental movement in the Soviet Union was one of the largest in the world.

Party organisations in their practical work relied upon the for those times broad network of agronomic, veterinary and livestock centres. Experienced peasants worked here along with the specialists.

The huge amount of agricultural literature, aimed at promoting the progressive experience of peasant farms was very important. In 1924, thousands of posters and leaflets were published, showing the results achieved by peasant farms.

The peasants were drawn to advanced farm management methods not only by mass promotion, but also by the efficient measures, applying Lenin's principle of material incentives. In 1924 many peasant farms were awarded bonuses for the best yields and for applying all scientific farming rules.

The Party's huge organisational work was an unprecedented source of farming initiative among the peasant masses. This was the main condition for the future expansion of Soviet agriculture. Another important factor was that as Lenin's agrarian policy was implemented the progressive forces of the rural intelligentsia began to support Soviet power's agrarian measures. We should remember that the agrarian ideas of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Zemstvo had taken deep root in the rural intelligentsia, especially among agronomists, land surveyors, foresters, vets and teachers. It is not surprising that they had opposed the agrarian laws of Soviet power. Now, thanks to the ideological influence of the Bolshevik Party, the progressive members of the intelligentsia rose to the defence of the agrarian policy of Soviet power, and actively supported it.

The 13th Party Congress noted that the major shift of the rural intelligentsia towards Soviet power was a new stage in the cultural development of the countryside. The Congress outlined concrete measures to further involve the intelligentsia in social and political work in the countryside. "The growth that we have noted in the social activity of the rural intelligentsia (district agronomists, land surveyors, forest specialists and teachers) requires that the Party carefully study and politically educate these elements, drawing them into Soviet work."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions...*, Vol. 3, p. 82.

The first successes in Soviet agriculture were shown at the agricultural exhibitions, which were extensively held, and in which the peasants were very interested. Here they could see for themselves the results of the unshackled labour of the liberated peasants.

NEP made the peasantry interested in crop management. For the first time the Russian peasant learnt to calculate and weigh up how to obtain more and better products from his land and livestock with the least expenditure. This was a major breakthrough in his life, and a great instructive farming experience for the Party.

The Party's first task was to assist the farms, reviving on the liberated land, and more extensively employ those agricultural improvements, which had already been accepted by the most progressive peasants. The agricultural initiative of the peasant masses had to be directed to developing scientific farming and employing the most advantageous farm management methods.

The second, more difficult task was to direct the agricultural aspirations of the peasants into the correct class channel. The Party was well aware that economic progress in the countryside was one thing, and that the class direction of that progress was another. The revival of single small peasant farms presented great political and class difficulties.

In the first years of NEP the Party and Soviet power established a system of organisational and economic measures to develop agriculture's productive forces. The crop failure and famine of 1921 held back NEP, the beneficial effects of which were only felt in 1922-1923. But despite these difficulties, agricultural production progressed at a fairly fast rate.

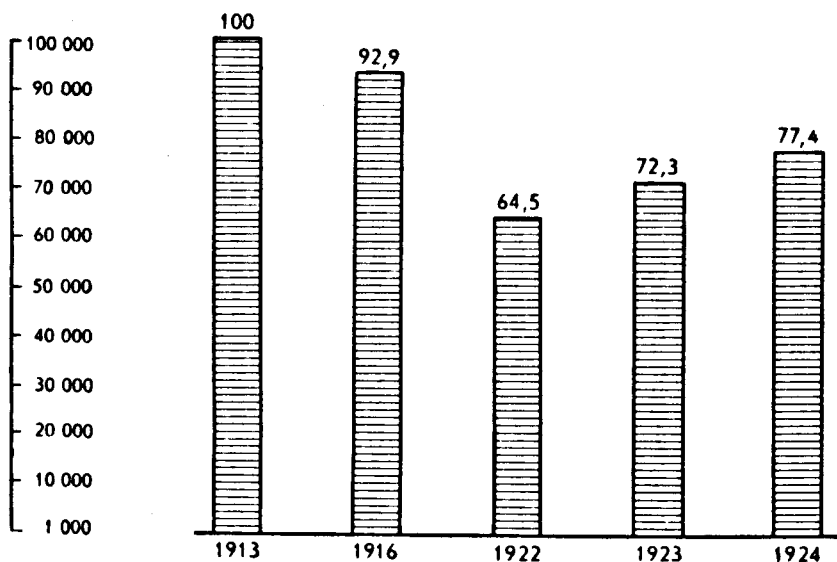
In the first three years of NEP the gross agricultural output of the USSR came close to the pre-war level. In 1923-1924 the national gross income from agriculture was 71 per cent (6,341.5 million rubles) and in 1924-1925 it was 72.9 per cent (6,504.5 million rubles) of the 1911 income (8,926.6 million rubles).<sup>1</sup> This significant growth in gross output was largely due to the stimulus given to the peasant in Soviet agriculture to improve his farming.

As the entire economic life of the countryside revived, there were strong tendencies to expand the crop area and to utilise new lands. In 1923 alone, once the consequences of the famine had been overcome, the crop area in the USSR grew by 17.7 per cent compared to 1922 and reached 72.3 per cent of the pre-war level.

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Account of the National Agricultural Committee of the RSFSR for 1923-1924*, p. 44. (Note that 1924 was very unfavourable for agriculture: many gubernias suffered from drought. This greatly influenced the gross income for 1924-1925).

In 1924 it increased by another 26 per cent and was 77.4 per cent of the crop area in 1913.<sup>1</sup> The greatest growth in cultivated area was in the RSFSR and the Ukraine. This is shown on the diagram, based on data from Narkomzem.



Percentage movement of cultivated land in the Russian Federation and the Ukraine.

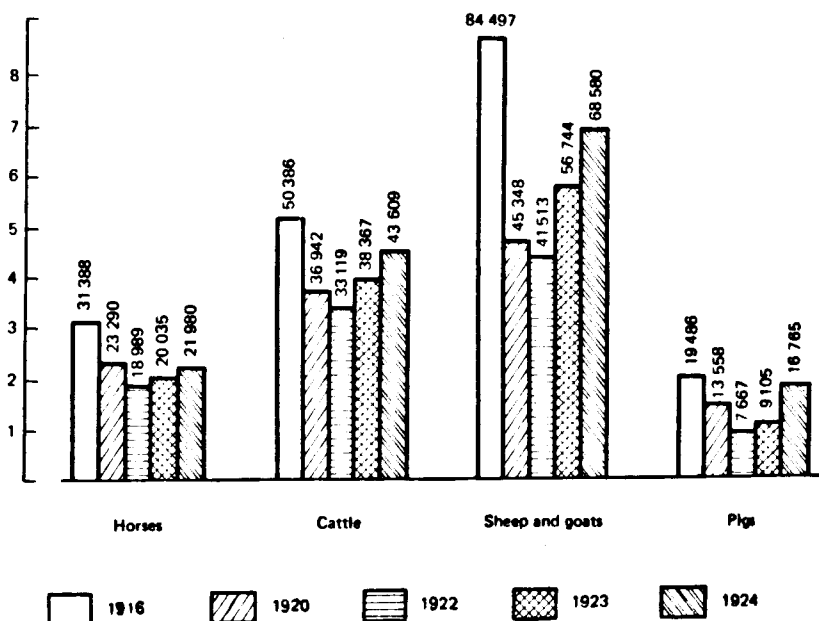
It is typical that there was a second tendency within this process to sow more marketable, intensive crops on this cultivated area.

The year 1923 was also a turning point for livestock production. This sector had suffered great losses during the war years and in the famine of 1921. The situation now took a marked turn for the better. In one year alone the total head of livestock increased by 14.3 per cent. In 1923 the number of head of livestock compared to 1916 was: horses—64 per cent, cattle—76.6 per cent. The number of young animals grew especially fast. While the number of adult horses grew by 5.1 per cent, the number of foals increased by 21.4 per cent. While the number of grown cattle increased by

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.



16.6 per cent, the number of heifers and bullocks grew by 22.8 per cent, and the number of calves by 30.4 per cent.



Livestock in the Russian Federation and the Ukraine (in thousands)

As agriculture expanded, not only did the food situation improve at home, but it also became possible to export grain, and strengthen links with other countries. While in 1923 the Soviet Republic had exported 40 million poods of grain, in 1924 it exported 250 million poods.<sup>1</sup>

The Communist Party's material, organisational and scientific farming assistance to the countryside led to a gradual improvement in agriculture and a growth in its output. This had a beneficial effect on the political mood of the peasant masses and reinforced the Bolshevik influence in the countryside. The growth of peasant economy in its turn helped to rehabilitate and develop large-scale state industry. Compared to 1921 its 1923 output nearly

<sup>1</sup> See: *CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions...*, Vol. 2, p. 517.

doubled. In 1923 the total output of large-scale industry grew to 35 per cent of the pre-war level, while in the previous year it had been only 20-22 per cent of the latter.<sup>1</sup>

The 13th Party Congress in 1924 examined the results of economic construction and noted that the Party's New Economic Policy had fulfilled all the tasks the Party had set it. "The New Economic Policy has led to general economic growth: agriculture is undoubtedly improving; state industry is growing and becoming large-scale industry; wages are gradually increasing and there is an improvement in labour productivity."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. THE NEW ALIGNMENT OF CLASS FORCES AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

In the first years of NEP, not only were there changes in farming, but there was a new alignment of class forces. On the one hand, peasant farms made steady progress, expanding the crop area, employing more advanced scientific farming methods, and the material and cultural level of the peasantry improved as a whole. On the other, there was greater differentiation in the countryside, with a noticeable growth in prosperous families, alongside a considerable number of poor peasants.

Although these two extreme poles were not as sharply differentiated as before the Revolution, nevertheless both capitalist elements and the rural proletariat showed their class nature. This was not, of course, unexpected. When NEP was introduced Lenin had foreseen that the growth of capitalist elements was inevitable. "What is free exchange? It is unrestricted trade, and that means turning back towards capitalism... All of us who have studied at least the elements of Marxism know that this exchange and freedom of trade inevitably lead to a division of commodity producers into owners of capital and owners of labour-power, a division into capitalists and wage-workers...."<sup>3</sup>

There were three distinct stages in the process of differentiation in the Soviet countryside. In the *first stage* from October 1917 to 1918 there was an averaging out in the countryside, a levelling of the peasantry, and a sharp reduction in its extreme poles. The

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 519.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the RCP(B)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 218.

*second stage*, from 1919 to 1922 was during the Civil War, ruin and famine, when the countryside was impoverished, peasant economy was in complete decline and there was almost no differentiation in the village. The *third stage*, under NEP, saw the revival of economic life, a levelling out in the countryside while at the same time the upper crust of the peasantry re-established itself and an agricultural proletariat appeared.

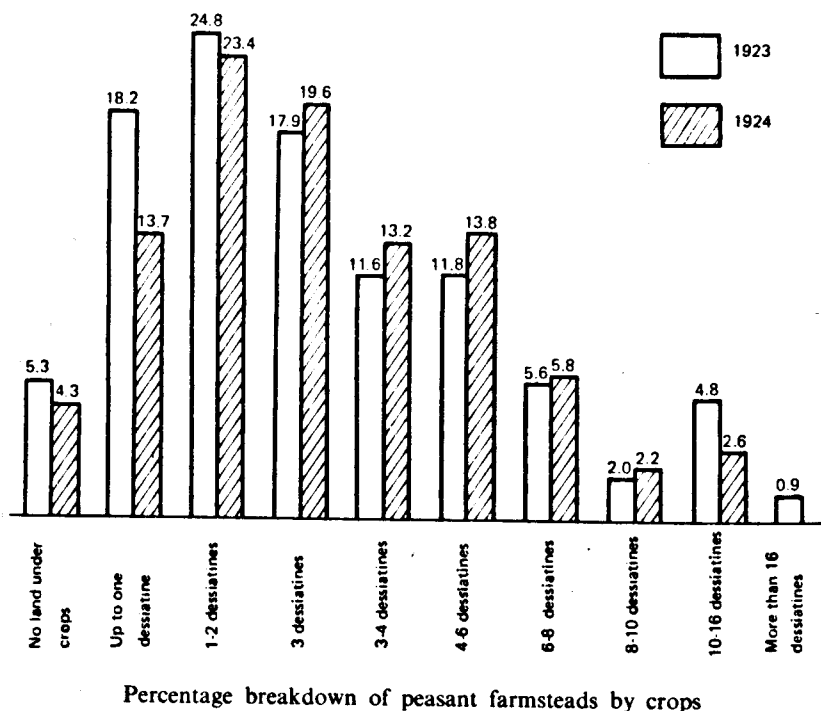
By the second year of NEP, this new process was in full swing, which the resolution of the 12th Congress, "The Work of the Russian Communist Party in the Countryside", shows: "The economic relations that have emerged under NEP have impeded many of the small peasants, and impoverished the others. It is largely the middle and prosperous peasants who are doing well. A kulak class is forming, in the shape of farms, which are growing in strength by lending agricultural implements, seed and cattle on credit on unfavourable, usurious terms, by renting land, by trading and by producing and selling home-made vodka, etc. As the socio-economic relations which have emerged under NEP develop, the proportion of kulaks is growing ever larger."<sup>1</sup>

The table below gives a good picture of the differentiation in the countryside, drawn up by A. I. Khryashcheva, a prominent scholar at the time. On the basis of data collected from 48 gubernias in the RSFSR, she established the following alignment of social groups, according to their possession of crop area, draught animals and their budget: small peasants—62.7 per cent, middle peasants—23.1 per cent, prosperous and rich peasants—14.2 per cent. The tendencies of social differentiation, based on various areas of the so-called consumer belt (in per cent) give a more complete picture.

Type of peasant	1920	1923
Farmless . . . . .	7.0	2.0
Small . . . . .	34.0	31.5
Lower middle . . . . .	34.7	35.8
Middle . . . . .	21.0	24.7
Prosperous . . . . .	2.7	4.4
Rich . . . . .	0.6	1.6
	75.7	69.3
	3.3	6.0

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 2, p. 472.

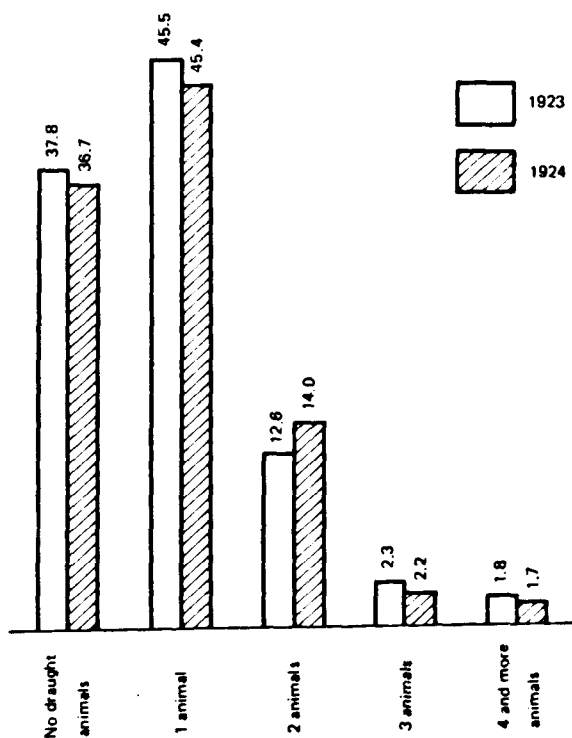
1923 brought with it a sharp economic revival of all groups. Once the consequences of the 1921 famine had been overcome, there was a noticeable socio-economic shift in the countryside: the number of farmless peasants fell by 70 per cent, and the small peasants greatly decreased, while there was a growth of middle peasants and especially of prosperous and rich peasants, who almost doubled in number.<sup>1</sup> "We must not close our eyes to the fact that the switch from the appropriation of surpluses to the tax will mean more kulaks under the new system. They will appear where they could not appear before."<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> See: A. I. Khryashcheva, *Gruppy i klassy v krestyanstve* (Groups and Classes Among the Peasantry), Moscow, 1924, pp. 62, 70 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 225.

The property difference between peasants grew more apparent with every year, which is particularly clearly seen from the data on the distribution of gross incomes. For example, one small peasant farm (sowing up to four dessiatines) had an annual income of



Percentage breakdown of peasant farmsteads by number of draught animals

about 425 rubles, which meant 75 rubles per head; the same figures for middle farms (from 4.1 to 8 dessiatines) were 721 and 94 rubles, for prosperous and rich farms (more than 8 dessiatines), 1,124 and 112 rubles of gross income. While small farms bought 25 rubles worth of industrial goods per year and middle peasants

35 rubles worth, the prosperous peasants bought 70 rubles worth.<sup>1</sup> The difference, as we see, is huge (see the diagrams on pages 485, 486).

As the links between the urban bourgeoisie and the prosperous peasants began to expand, the traders and money-lenders began to establish themselves and reinforce their hold. With every year this class differentiation increased the struggle between the socialist and capitalist elements, within the economy. 1923 showed that the bourgeois elements who had thrived under NEP began to spread their wings and tried to gain control of the most important threads of the country's economy, in an attempt to undermine and destroy the socialist unity of town and countryside.

It was during the period of peaceful economic construction that the Party and Soviet power first had to cope with a struggle between private capitalist and socialist elements on a large scale. Trade, where private capital had firmly established itself, was the main battle ground. Private capital made up 83 per cent, co-operative capital—10 per cent, and state capital—7 per cent of rural retail trade. Private capital was less widespread in the towns than in the countryside, but it operated with much larger sums of money. On the whole in the country, private capital made up 50.4 per cent, co-operative capital 10.7 per cent, and state capital—38.9 per cent of wholesale and retail trade.<sup>2</sup> According to approximate calculations, in 1922-1923, there were 600 million gold rubles in private capital, while the clear profit of the traders was 200-300 million rubles.

Another area where the peasantry was vulnerable was agricultural credit, which was completely controlled by the kulaks and money-lenders. In the countryside there was no local network of state or co-operative credit, which could have provided the poor peasant with cheap credit and thereby get rid of the extortionate credit offered by the kulaks and money-lenders. The kulak and money-lender largely enslaved the peasant poor through draught animals and agricultural implements, which the poor peasant was constantly in need of.

As the social differentiation of the peasantry increased, so the class struggle in the countryside became more acute. The middle peasantry again began to vacillate towards the kulaks, which weakened the political alliance of the working class and the working mass of the peasantry. This was also caused by the sales pro-

<sup>1</sup> See: A. I. Khryashcheva, *Groups and Classes Among the Peasantry*, pp. 71, 73.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Trinadtsaty syezd RKP(B)* (13th Congress of the RCP(B)), Verbatim Report, Moscow, 1963, p. 384 (in Russian).

blems in 1923, which afflicted the middle peasant with low prices for agricultural products. Although the kulaks and money-lenders were mainly behind the struggle against low prices, the Communist Party nevertheless had to bear in mind that through this they would achieve a break of the middle peasantry with the working class.

Thus, the first years of NEP saw noticeable class shifts in the country. *The fundamental classes, the working class and the peasantry, changed in nature.* During the first years of the Revolution, Russia's proletariat was declassed and scattered while the peasantry was ruined and impoverished. As industry grew and agriculture improved, the working class again consolidated and became a powerful force. The peasantry also changed: it became free, economically stable, and its political and farming activity became much greater.

But socio-economic development differed greatly in town and countryside. The expansion of industry led to the rehabilitation and consolidation of the proletariat into a single, united class, while in the countryside, on the contrary, the improvement in agriculture saw the peasantry increasingly splitting up into different class groups and a growing tendency to further class struggle. The Party therefore had to devise measures which would direct the peasantry along the course of socialist development.

It was obvious that the moral and political stimuli that the Party had given the peasantry during the Revolution were exhausted. The peasant had long forgotten about the fight against the landowner; it was now a matter of how the peasant could best manage his farm, how to increase crop production, provide the countryside with cheap goods, isolate the kulaks and free the peasantry from economic dependence upon them. In brief, it was essential to find moral and political stimuli which would most effectively draw the peasantry into socialist construction.

The 12th Party Congress therefore examined aspects of agrarian policy. Two resolutions passed by the Congress, "Fiscal Policy in the Countryside" and "The Work of the Russian Communist Party in the Countryside", outlined practical measures to improve agricultural economy and assist the peasantry. These measures were based on two of Lenin's articles, published just before the Congress: "How We Should Reorganise the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection" and "Better Fewer, But Better".

*The change in fiscal policy was of great assistance to the peasantry.* The Congress's decision pointed out that a gradual transition from a tax in kind to a monetary tax, from many different

taxes to one single agricultural tax was essential. "A single agricultural tax must put an end to the many different forms of taxation, which the peasant justly complains about. These prevent him from calculating exactly his expenditure and income, and therefore from managing his farm. The Communist Party should introduce a system of taxation which will allow the peasant to calculate beforehand the exact sum he owes in direct taxation and to have dealings with the collector of this tax alone."<sup>1</sup>

Individual peasant farms and separate districts were taxed differently, depending on their agricultural specialisations. The Congress supported applying the class principle to fiscal policy. Soviet legislation, especially fiscal, "should consider class divisions in the countryside, and therefore place the main economic burden on the most prosperous farms. Both the decrees and instructions themselves of the central organs and their application *in situ* should light the economic burdens on small farms, and relieve the poorest peasants completely from some of the taxes."<sup>2</sup>

*The next serious measure designed to economically assist peasant farms was the decision to expand the foreign grain market, to re-establish the world economic links, destroyed by the two wars.* In order to relieve the market of grain surpluses, the Congress's decision stated: "The Soviet Government should ensure that peasant grain can freely be sold abroad; providing agriculture with foreign markets, lost during the imperialist war, should be the immediate task of Soviet power, as the lack of agricultural exports from Russia leads inevitably to extremely low prices for grain on the home market. This, in its turn, leads to a reduction in arable land, to depression in peasant farms, and hence to a general depression in state exports."<sup>3</sup>

The Congress devised major measures to assist the Party's political, organisational and educational work in the countryside. These included measures to strengthen local branches of Soviet power, expand the activity of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, increase work among the youth and women peasants, consolidate rural Party and Komsomol organisations, raise the political awareness of Communists and Komsomol members, promote advanced agricultural methods on a large scale among the peasants, etc. These were all intended to economically and culturally develop the Soviet countryside. The Congress issued a directive to

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in *Resolutions and Decisions...*, Vol. 2, p. 431.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 475.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 432.



local Party and Soviet organs to increase incentives for the best results in applying advanced scientific farming methods and crop management.

### 3. PRICE IMBALANCES AND SALES DIFFICULTIES FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS. PARTY MEASURES TO REINFORCE THE LINK BETWEEN TOWN AND COUNTRYSIDE

Despite all the favourable factors, the conditions for economic rehabilitation were very complex and there were tremendous economic, organisational, and political difficulties. These occurred because the Soviet Union had not only to rehabilitate a ruined economy, but at the same time to build a new socialist economy combined with the old peasant economy. "...We must know that the problem of the New Economic Policy, the fundamental, decisive and overriding problem, is to establish a link between the new economy that we have begun to create (very badly, very clumsily, but have nevertheless begun to create, on the basis of an entirely new, socialist economy, of a new system of production and distribution) and the peasant economy, by which millions and millions of peasants obtain their livelihood.

"This link has been lacking, and we must create it before anything else. Everything else must be subordinated to this."<sup>1</sup>

Historical experience has shown that this was one of the most difficult and complex problems for the Party in its management of economic construction. A serious disruption of economic relations between socialist industry and peasant farming occurred in the sale of products. It greatly damaged the link between town and countryside, the alliance between the working class and the peasantry.

Signs of these economic difficulties appeared back in the autumn of 1922, when there was a sharp rise in prices on all goods, and large imbalances appeared, as prices rose on industrial goods and fell on agricultural goods. This disparity gradually increased until by the autumn of 1923 it was extreme. The table below shows the imbalance of prices.

The data show that over the period indicated prices fluctuated generally, extremely unequally, and in confusion. Prices for all goods generally increased, but prices for industrial goods rose par-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 269-70.

**General Trend of Wholesale Prices in European Russia**  
(on the 1st of each month; 1913 prices taken as being 1;  
figures are expressed in millions)

Type of goods	1922			1923				
	VIII	IX	XI	I	III	V	VII	IX
Grain and fodder . . . . .	5.42	5.01	8.85	12.32	18.74	26.80	65.14	134.16
Other vegetable products . . . . .	6.91	5.85	9.53	13.14	20.59	30.61	71.79	162.19
Animal products . . . . .	3.96	3.83	6.68	14.46	22.48	34.89	67.50	170.61
Products of food industry . . . . .	6.88	8.41	19.06	25.05	44.75	85.87	194.04	698.88
All foodstuffs . . . . .	5.78	5.62	9.90	14.48	22.48	33.70	77.05	182.96
All metals . . . . .	2.65	2.91	7.29	11.90	22.91	55.89	128.45	436.28
Whole textile industry . . . . .	4.19	5.48	15.16	30.23	46.61	101.42	215.10	692.17
Leather goods . . . . .	3.51	4.40	11.26	16.04	26.61	48.72	108.24	428.38
All agricultural goods . . . . .	5.47	4.99	8.62	12.93	19.97	29.94	68.99	153.68
All industrial goods . . . . .	4.04	4.69	10.92	19.64	35.04	68.11	142.05	463.75
General figure . . . . .	4.73	4.85	- 9.67	15.74	26.17	44.64	97.96	275.29

ticularly fast. If we take cotton from the whole textile industry, then prices rose from four units on August 1, 1922 to 692 on September 1, 1923; for products of the food industry, from 6 to 698, for metal products from 2 to 436.

Retail prices rose even more sharply. While wholesale prices could be fairly easily regulated by the state, retail prices were virtually outside its control. The imbalanced movement of prices for the same period can be seen from the table below (pre-war prices are taken as being 100):<sup>1</sup>

	Industrial		Agricultural	
	wholesale	retail	wholesale	retail
<b>1922</b>				
August . . . . .	92	98.5	112	100.2
September . . . .	102	112	97	94
October . . . . .	110	123	88	89
November . . . . .	117	136	82	83
December . . . . .	116	133	82	84
<b>1923</b>				
January . . . . .	122	139	77	81
March . . . . .	128	146	72	78
May . . . . .	145	150	61	76
July . . . . .	142	158	63	72
September . . . .	167	179	50	66
November . . . . .	157	175	54	64

The data show that prices for industrial goods were extremely high, contrasted to meagre prices for agricultural products. The situation became so ridiculous, that a peasant had to pay 250 poods of grain for a pair of boots.

But it was even more difficult to acquire agricultural implements and machinery, which for the small peasant were in reality out of reach. The table below shows this (see p. 496).

The price imbalances deprived the peasant of material incentives to increase agricultural productivity. Lenin more than once pointed out that peasant farming could only be organised when there was a growth in productive forces. "The issue of the struggle depends upon whether we succeed in organising the small peasants

<sup>1</sup> See: 13th Congress of the RCP(B), Verbatim Report, p. 377.

on the basis of the development of their productive forces with proletarian state assistance for this development, or whether the capitalists gain control over them.”<sup>1</sup>

	Pre-war prices	1923 prices	Pre-war	1923
	rubles		poods of rye	
1 plough . . . . .	6	11	10	36
1 winnowing-machine . . . . .	40	84	60-70	200-280
1 mowing machine . . .	125	245	208	816

Without a doubt, the price imbalance slowed down agriculture's rehabilitation and delayed the progress of scientific farming. During 1923 the peasantry bought far fewer agricultural implements and machinery. The low sales led to them building up in warehouses to the value of 12-14 million gold rubles, while their annual production amounted to 11 million rubles. At first the production target for 1922-1923 was set at 19, 650, 000 rubles, but it was later reduced, and in 1923-1924 it was set at a mere 14 million rubles. However, there was no guarantee that this target for producing agricultural machinery would be reached.<sup>2</sup>

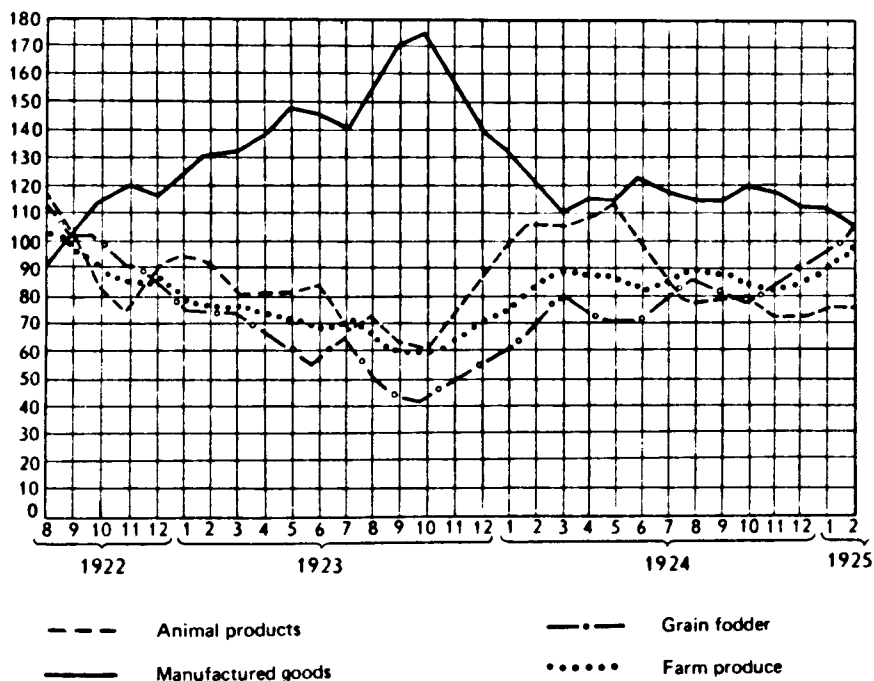
The disordered trends of both wholesale and retail prices made all economic relations unstable, which was obviously a source of anxiety for the public. We will examine only the most important, the most influential of the reasons for this serious situation.

The fundamental reason was the difference in growth rate between state industry and agriculture, in the restricted markets both at home and abroad, in the disorganised exchange between town and countryside. All this led, as the resolution of the 13th Conference of the RCP(B) (1924) pointed out, to a disparity “between the extremely high prices for industrial goods, and low prices for agricultural products. Industry has geared itself to the urban market, which can pay higher prices, and when the time came to sell crops, it could not sell its goods to the less solvent mass consumer, the peasant. On the other hand, the peasantry

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, “The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Department”, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Sotsialisticheskoye knozyaistvo* (Socialist Economy), 1923, No. 4-5, p. 288 (in Russian).

could not find an adequate market at home or abroad to sell its grain profitably, which accounted for the low price of the latter.”<sup>1</sup>



Price ratio of agricultural and industrial goods

The second reason was undeveloped trade relations, with high overheads both for industry and in the commercial world and a weak monetary economy, where with two currency systems, the peasant suffered most from the devaluation of Soviet banknotes. "The crisis was the result of the discrepancy between separate branches of the economy and primarily of the inability of state industry and trade to reach the mass peasant market."<sup>2</sup>

The third reason was the lack of experience in economic construction, planning, management and organising the practical affairs of economic, financial and trade bodies. The apparatus of these bodies was faulty and their staff did not have enough knowl-

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 2, p. 516.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 517.

edge or qualifications. Socialist management was for them a completely new, unknown field. As centralised management and control was inadequate, economic departments—trusts and syndicates—often acted independently, self-interestedly, with no regard for state plans and tasks.

The economic crisis was not caused by subjective factors alone; it was also an objective result of the overall difficulties of the rehabilitation period and the growth of the economy. While the price imbalance was damaging to agriculture, the opposite was true of the other sectors of the economy. In the first three years trade and co-operative organisations accumulated considerable working resources, which then allowed them to expand their trading activity and make progress in their fight against the private trader.

The sales crisis forced the Party to look into the root causes of the situation, discover the weak points in economic construction and in its own practical activity, and to take measures to ensure the further progress of all the branches of the economy. The Trotskyites drew different conclusions from the economic problems and in the autumn of 1923 they again came out against the Party policy. The Trotskyites drew together the remnants of anti-Party groups, such as Democratic Centralism, the Workers' Opposition, the Left Communists and raised a hue and cry about the collapse of the economy and the future downfall of Soviet power. The Trotskyites proposed, in order to solve the sales crisis, cutting down large-scale industry and closing enterprises in heavy industry on the pretext that they were unprofitable and that there was no home market for them. They supported abolishing the monopoly of foreign trade and increasing foreign capital in the country's economy.

The Party rebuffed these capitulatory proposals and outlined the true course to overcome these economic difficulties, to ensure new progress in all sectors of the economy. The 13th All-Russia Party Conference, and then the 13th Party Congress worked out an extensive programme of economic and organisational measures to strengthen the link between socialist industry and peasant farming and to squeeze private capital out of all sectors of the economy. In the first half of 1924 the Central Committee of the Party and the Soviet Government implemented many of these measures. [Firstly] prices for industrial goods were considerably reduced and prices for agricultural products markedly increased, both for the home and the foreign markets. More grain was exported at favourable terms for the peasantry. Favourable terms for purchasing agricultural implements and credit for draught animals were

established. The peasantry quickly felt the material advantages of these effective measures.

Two facts prove this. For example, grain exports increased from 40 million poods in 1923 to 250 million poods in 1924. Previously a pood of rye cost 20-21 kopecks, after prices were raised, it cost 41-45 kopecks. The second proof is the situation with agricultural implements. After prices were lowered and favourable terms were provided, Gosselsindikat (State Agricultural Syndicate) and co-operative organisations sold agricultural machinery and implements to the value of 17,700,000 rubles and received orders to the value of another 13 million rubles in the first four months of 1924. It is important that the demand was for machines like ploughs, cultivators, sowing machines, harvesters, threshing machines, etc. They received their first orders (100) for tractors.

Much was done to regulate the trade and distributive apparatus which determined prices. Many intermediary links were abolished; overheads were reduced to a minimum; taxes on the most essential industrial goods were reduced; charges for rail and water transportation of goods were sharply reduced. *These were truly revolutionary economic measures, which radically improved sales and ensured the healthy development of all sectors of the economy.*

The 13th Party Congress urged trade and co-operative organisations to fight against private capital to squeeze it out of trade, and to gain command of the market by lowering prices, improving quality, and by increasing state regulation of trade in the country. The Congress again upheld the necessity of a stable monopoly of foreign trade and of increasing exports generally, and of grain in particular. It decided to carry the monetary reform to the end.

Agriculture responded to the measures of fiscal policy and on improving credit to peasant farms taken by the Party and Soviet power. At the beginning of 1923 a single agricultural tax was introduced, which was partly collected in kind and partly in money. By the beginning of 1924 it became a single monetary tax.

The economic and political difficulties in the autumn of 1923 forced the Party to take a fresh look at agricultural credit and take measures to expand it. The lack of local state and co-operative credit was making the situation in the countryside morally and politically more difficult and giving rise to grave discontent among the poorest peasants, who were the first to be oppressed by the "Nepmen", kulaks and money-lenders. The first step against these new exploiters was to set up the State Agricultural Bank in 1923, which was allotted 300 million rubles. The local network of state and co-operative credit was seen as the basic way not only of

the state assisting the peasant, but also the peasant assisting the state.

In order to strengthen the economic link between town and countryside the 13th Congress proposed to expand primarily the light, but also the engineering industry, to expand agriculture and to assist peasant farms in cultivating more land. These measures were intended to increase both industrial and agricultural productivity and thereby expand the trade link between industry and agriculture and meet the growing needs of the working class and the peasantry. These measures enabled the Communist Party to rapidly eliminate economic difficulties, stabilise the socialist elements of the economy, and to give a new boost to industry and agriculture.

#### 4. STRENGTHENING THE ALLIANCE WITH THE MIDDLE PEASANT AND ORGANISING THE POOR PEASANT. MAJOR SUCCESSSES OF THE PARTY'S AGRARIAN POLICY

The goal, set by the 13th Congress, of strengthening the trade and productive link between town and countryside meant the Party had to step up its organisational and mass political work in the countryside. The situation was hampering the peasants, especially the middle peasants. NEP in practice had many weak points, which to a certain extent infringed the interests of the peasantry.

What were the reasons for this?

Firstly, the faulty price system and disordered sales of agricultural products both at home and abroad. This was a major blow to the middle peasant, the main producer in the Soviet countryside, who began to lose material incentives to further increase agricultural productivity. The middle peasant had a double burden: on the one hand, he suffered huge losses from the low price of grain and could not buy the industrial goods he needed for his farm; on the other, he fell more and more into the clutches of the bulk-buyer and money-lender, speculating in grain.

The poor peasants were even more dependent on the kulak and the money-lender. In great need of draught animals, implements, and seed, the poor peasant had to go begging to the kulak, who gave him credit on the most unfavourable terms.

The second reason was the disordered fiscal policy, which was still similar to that of War Communism. While the tax in kind was a great improvement, it still had many faults. The main one was



that there were so many different taxes: the tax in kind as such, the tax on labour and draught power, the financial tax on the homestead, and other taxes, set by the executive committees according to local conditions. Another fault was that the tax in kind and the monetary tax were mixed up together, which was very inconvenient for the peasant.

The third reason was to do with the organisational and political management of local Party and Soviet organisations. Some local Party organisations did not understand the new situation in the countryside under NEP and continued to organise the peasant masses by the old methods, sometimes similar to those of War Communism. All these reasons, of course, aggravated the economic problems in the countryside.

*We should also note here the complexity of the socio-economic process in the countryside.* We have already mentioned that the Party's agrarian policy had two aims: on the one hand, it encouraged the peasantry to develop farming initiative and personal incentive in increasing the productivity of individual farms, which inevitably led to the growth of prosperous and kulak elements; on the other, the Party kept strictly to the class line of restricting capitalist elements and protecting the interests of the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat.

At first this did not really affect the middle peasant. But as his farming power increased, he found himself more and more restricted by the class policy. It was in his interest to expand crop area, use intensive methods of farm management, lease land and employ hired labour. The middle peasant therefore expressed his dissatisfaction with the class policy by turning towards the kulaks. The shortcomings of NEP increased the vacillations of the middle peasant.

The Party made a correct and timely assessment of the unfavourable political situation in the countryside and made new moves to win back the middle peasant. In 1924-1925, Party congresses and conferences concentrated on strengthening the link between town and countryside, between the working class and the peasantry. At that time it was extremely important to improve the Party's work in the countryside, to educate and organise the peasant masses around the working class.

The 14th All-Russia Party Conference (April 1925) provided the political basis for these moves. It stated that the situation both at home and abroad made the peasant question important. Surrounded by hostile capitalist countries, the Soviet Union had rapidly to find internal forces and resources to build up socialist

industry. This was essential, as industry relied on the home peasant market.

The Party Conference set the task of drawing the middle peasantry into socialist construction and stated that it was essential to improve all the links of Party, state and agricultural work in the countryside, to increase political management of the peasant masses. *The Soviets and co-operatives, as powerful factors in organising and educating the peasants, had to increase their political and agricultural activity in order to combat the agricultural bourgeoisie.*

In order to isolate the kulaks and consolidate the peasant masses, it was essential to group active peasants around the Party in the countryside, who could link the Party with the many millions of peasants and become the support of Soviet power. The success of the Party's class and economic policy in the countryside depended on it. This meant that the management of the peasant masses had to be radically changed. Administrative elements had to be totally eliminated, the voice of the peasantry had to be heeded. It was essential not only to teach, but to learn from the masses. The Central Committee required all Communists to fully understand Lenin's statement: "...In the final analysis the fate of our Republic will depend on whether the peasant masses will stand by the working class, loyal to their alliance, or whether they will permit the 'Nepmen', i. e., the new bourgeoisie, to drive a wedge between them and the working class, to split them off from the working class."<sup>1</sup>

The Conference set the Party two main goals in the countryside. The *first goal* was to involve the peasant masses in general socialist economic development by organising them into co-operatives, bearing in mind that "the co-operative movement in the countryside should be the same educative force for the rural population, as the trade union is for the non-Party working masses".<sup>2</sup> The *second goal* was to increase the role and intensify the work of the Soviets and spread the socialist principles of Soviet democracy in the countryside. This meant resolutely involving the poor and middle peasants in the Soviets and other public organisations rallying them around the Party and further isolating the kulaks. "Where policy is concerned, the Party's fundamental directive should be to encourage the Soviets and improve the proletariat's leadership of

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, "How We Should Reorganise the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection", *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 486.

<sup>2</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, p. 192.

the peasantry through the branches of Soviet power by resolutely and conclusively following revolutionary law and rooting out the remnants of War Communism in administrative and political work."<sup>1</sup>

The 14th Party Conference outlined measures to spur on all public organisations in the countryside and give material and organisational assistance to the peasantry. The most important of these was to improve the fiscal policy and to reduce the overall amount of taxation. The Party Conference approved the Soviet Government's economic measures, considerably reduced the overall amount of the single agricultural tax and thereby transferred 100 million rubles (about 40 per cent of the total revenue from that tax) to volost Soviets to help them develop the countryside politically and economically. The Conference's decision placed the main burden of the single agricultural tax on the prosperous peasants and kulaks, "in order that taxation should protect the interests of the poor and middle peasants, thereby ensuring the further development of peasant farms..."<sup>2</sup>

Another important measure which helped the poor peasants was that of using the unemployed rural population. Despite the rapid growth of productive forces in industry and agriculture, it was not enough to employ all the rural population. The Party Conference stated that unemployed labour could be used "productively intensifying agriculture, stimulating industry, developing domestic and seasonal industry, making employing hired labour in agriculture and short-term leasing of land easier, organising migration and giving extensive productive assistance to poor peasant farms".<sup>3</sup>

These measures had a great impact upon the poor peasants. They were desperately in need of means of production and often forced into unfavourable deals with the kulak. Making employing hired labour and short-term leasing of land easier was one way of combating the kulak, because legal deals were more liable to state control.

In order to organise the peasantry and involve the middle peasant actively in socialist construction, the poor peasantry had to be rallied around the Party and organised into an independent political force which would combat the capitalist elements in the countryside. The Party indicated that involving poor peasants and middle peasants in the work of the Soviets and co-operatives was the best way of organising and politically educating them.

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 190.

The Party also concluded that the poor peasantry had to be independently organised. The Plenum of the Central Committee of the RCP(B) (1925), in following up the decision of the 14th Party Conference, decided to create groups of poor peasants in villages, volosts and districts, and give them all possible organisational and material assistance. Credit periods were extended and special funds for helping the poor peasants were set up under the Central Agricultural Bank. Small peasants were given favourable terms for establishing land tenure systems, buying timber, etc. Taxes on these farms were either greatly reduced or abolished altogether. Organising the poor peasants and drawing them and the middle peasants into the Soviets, co-operatives and collective farms greatly strengthened the position of the socialist and weakened the capitalist elements in the countryside.

Following the decision of the 14th Conference, the Party began to organise systematic assistance to the countryside by sending the best communist forces from the towns to work permanently in the countryside. This greatly helped the rural Party organisations to expand and consolidate, to increase political and educational work among the peasant masses. The following data show the results of this decision. By January 1926, in the rural areas there were 15,819 Party cells with more than 200,000 members. Note that a year earlier, on 1 January 1925, there were 13,879 rural Party cells with 154,731 members. These cells were split up in the following manner: 14,918 peasant cells (228,861 members), 341 Party cells in sovkhoses (3,581 members), 560 in collective farms and communes (6,094 members).<sup>1</sup>

The intensive efforts and huge constructive work on the part of the Party and the Soviet people meant that the country's economic and cultural life revived extremely rapidly. The Communist Party had steadfastly implemented Lenin's policy and overcome the tremendous difficulties of economic construction and thereby brought the country to the end of the rehabilitation period and laid the way for further socialist reconstruction in all sectors of the economy. 1925 was the decisive year of the rehabilitation period, culminating in a tremendous growth of the economy, which almost reached the pre-war level.

There had been great successes in restoring crop area. The data below (for the USSR) show this<sup>2</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> See: *The CPSU(B) in Figures*, 5th Issue, 1926, p. 14; 4th Issue, 1925, p. 4 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> See: *Sotsialisticheskoye stroitelstvo SSSR* (Socialist Construction in the USSR), Statistical Annual, Moscow, 1936, p. 280 (in Russian).

	1913	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925
Total cultivated land in million hectares . . . .	105.0	90.3	77.7	91.7	98.1	104.3
All cereals in million hectares including wheat . . . .	94.4	79.8	66.2	78.6	82.9	87.3
Cotton in thousand and hectares	31.6	23.5	14.4	18.4	22.0	24.9
Flax in thousand hectares . . . .	688.0	99.1	70.3	220.7	447.4	591.0
Sugar beet in thousand hectares	1,398.0	938.0	1,027.4	1,125.3	1,284.3	1,575.8
	648.7	220.9	182.0	264.4	379.2	533.8

The other important branch of agriculture, livestock production, also made good progress. With the exception of the number of horses, which had dropped greatly during the war years, the population of all livestock exceeded the pre-war level, which the following table shows (for the USSR):

*Livestock Population*<sup>1</sup>  
(on July 1; in million head)

	1916	1922	1923	1924	1925
Horses . . . . .	35.8	24.1	24.6	25.7	27.1
Cattle . . . . .	60.6	45.8	52.9	59.0	62.1
including dairy cattle . . . . .	26.0	24.8	26.1	27.1	28.6
Sheep and goats . . . .	121.2	91.1	95.3	109.0	122.9
Pigs . . . . .	20.9	12.1	12.9	22.2	21.8

Large-scale socialist industry, which was becoming the leading sector of the economy, was growing rapidly. In 1925 its output was more than three-quarters of the pre-war industrial output. Large-scale industry began to develop more rapidly than agricul-

<sup>1</sup> See: *Socialist Construction in the USSR*, p. 354.

ture. However, once it had reached a certain level, it could not expand successfully without replacing its old material and technical basis with a new technical basis.

But although socialist industry was developing rapidly, the Soviet Union was still an agrarian country, with a larger agricultural than industrial output. Agriculture provided two-thirds of economic production, and industry only one-third. *At this turning point in the history of the USSR, the Party set the great historic task of changing the country from an agrarian into an industrial one, capable of meeting all its own needs.*

## 5. FOURTEENTH PARTY CONGRESS. END OF THE FIRST STAGE OF THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD. THE PARTY'S POLICY OF INDUSTRIALISING THE COUNTRY

The historic decisions of the 14th Party Congress (December 1925) set the stage for the sharp turn-around to the new stage of economic construction, of preparing to rebuild the whole economy. The Congress analysed the results of economic construction thus: "The last year has seen the economy as a whole expand rapidly and approach the pre-war level.... The proportion of *socialist* industry, state and co-operative trade, nationalised credit and other commanding heights of the proletarian state is growing fast. The *economic offensive* of the proletariat under the New Economic Policy and the advance of the Soviet economy towards socialism are now upon us."<sup>1</sup>

The 14th Party Congress outlined the policy for industrialising the country and unanimously approved the Politbureau's plan to extensively build up heavy industry. This marked the end of the first stage of NEP and the beginning of the second. *In the first stage* the Party had concentrated on rehabilitating agriculture, for it was impossible for the economy to move forward without this. *In the second stage* the Party had to concentrate on building large-scale socialist industry, because on that depended the construction of the socialist foundation in all sectors of the economy.

The Party had adopted the correct policy. The industrialisation of the country had now to become the chief link which would pull up all the other links and solve all the urgent problems facing the

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, p. 246.

country in building socialism. Socialist industry alone could provide the country with economic independence, reinforce its defence potential, and create a new genuinely socialist economy.

Lenin's teaching that it was possible to achieve the complete victory of socialism in one country by internal forces and resources lay behind the historical goal of radically rebuilding the entire economy on the basis of socialism. In the bitter struggle with anti-Party factions, the Party Congress upheld Lenin's theory of the socialist revolution and outlined the correct way of putting it into practice. The Congress proved convincingly that the Soviet Union had all the essential means to build a complete socialist society, and inspired the Party and the Soviet people with a firm belief in the victory of socialism in the USSR. As the 14th Congress developed Lenin's teaching on establishing the material and technical basis for socialism, it made the true nature of socialist industrialisation clear and provided a scientific foundation for new sources of accumulation and the new Soviet method of building industry.

The decisions of the 14th Party Congress thoroughly analysed the socio-economic development of the country, showed the new alignment of class forces, and the basic tendencies of the intensified class struggle in the countryside. Under NEP the economy had developed in contradictory ways in the struggle between different private and state, individual and collective economic structures. This struggle had been most acute in agriculture, where at the same time capitalist elements had steadily increased as socialist elements in the form of agricultural and credit co-operatives, collective farms and sovkhozes developed.

All this meant that in the countryside there were two distinct tendencies, socialist and capitalist. In the struggle between these two contradictory tendencies "the growing power of the ruling proletariat, the growth of state industry and the expansion of state and co-operative credit would increasingly ensure the victory of socialist elements. In the general growth of the country's productive forces, the development of the countryside will more and more tend towards socialism, largely through building co-operatives."<sup>1</sup>

In the struggle between these two social forces it was especially urgent to strengthen the political and economic alliance between the working class and the peasant masses. The 14th Congress analysed the class struggle and showed that it was marked by the attempts of the kulaks to gain control over the middle peasantry

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, p. 231.

and weaken the growing political influence of the working class in the countryside. The Congress therefore set the Party the fundamental task of *again winning over the middle peasants*, strengthening the position of the poor peasants and rural proletariat, and rallying them around the working class. The Party's main job in the countryside was to gain control over the middle peasant and involve him in building socialist forms of farming.

The Party Congress noted the threat represented by two deviations in the Party on the peasant question. Both reflected the intensive class struggle in the countryside and departed from Lenin's policy.

[The *first deviation*] overestimated the growth of the kulaks and capitalist elements in the countryside and rejected the stability of the alliance between the working class and the poor and middle peasants. *This was the Left deviation*, which claimed that there was a pure revival of capitalism in the countryside, that socialist development in the Soviet countryside was the same as its development under capitalism. Zinoviev therefore proposed intensifying the class struggle and returning to the policy of neutralising the middle peasant. Under the pretence of combating the kulaks, the Trotskyites and supporters of Zinoviev wanted to strike a blow at the middle peasants. This deviation was dangerous because it led to the destruction of the alliance between the working class and the middle peasants, to weakening the growing influence of the proletariat on the peasant masses, and to artificially stirring up the class struggle in the countryside, to returning to the policy of the Poor Peasants' Committee. "Every underestimation, therefore, of the middle peasant," stated the Congress's decision, "a failure to understand his exceptionally important role, an attempt to turn the Party from a long-term alliance with him to a policy of neutralising him, a 'fear of the middle peasant' will lead in practice to undermining the dictatorship of the proletariat, and thereby break up the worker-peasant bloc. The kulaks should be combated by organising the poor peasants against them and by strengthening the alliance between the proletariat and the poor and middle peasants in order to isolate the kulaks."<sup>1</sup>

[The *second deviation*], on the contrary, underestimated the role of the kulak and capitalist elements in the countryside, and covered up the class struggle. *This was the Right deviation*, which asserted that NEP was not leading to a revival of capitalist elements in the countryside, that there was no differentiation in the

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 248-49.



countryside and that the kulak had disappeared and was absorbed by the general mass of the peasantry. Bukharin saw the countryside as a uniform peasant mass and tried to advance the bourgeois slogan of getting rich, which in fact meant encouraging the kulaks to exploit the poorest peasants. This deviation was a great threat. The Congress condemned the deviation as "underestimating the differentiation in the countryside, unable to see the threat posed by the growth of the kulaks and other forms of capitalist exploitation, unwilling to recognise that it was essential to rebuff the kulaks and limit their exploitative tendencies, unable to see that it was necessary for the proletarian party to organise and rally the poor peasants and farm labourers against the kulaks."<sup>1</sup>

The 14th Party Congress decisively condemned both deviations and noted the particular threat of the "Left" deviation, which was greatly damaging socialist construction. "The more so, as at present," stressed the Congress's decisions, "this deviation threatens to return to the policy of dispossessing the kulaks, wrecking the Party's present policy in the countryside, which has already made much political headway, wrecking the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, wrecking all our constructive work."<sup>2</sup>

The 14th Party Congress ratified the decision of the 14th Party Conference to improve the Party's work in the countryside. These measures enabled the Party to strengthen the alliance between the poor and middle peasants and isolate the kulak through its organisational, political and economic work. The class organisations of poor peasants, set up by the Party, were a source of strength against the kulak and reinforced the working class in the countryside.

The change to the policy of industrialisation saw the beginning of new productive links between town and countryside. At first, when a weak industry could only provide the countryside with the most essential articles, this had been largely a trade link. Industry now had to provide machines, chemical fertilisers, agricultural implements and help change the methods of peasant farming. The trade link was becoming a productive link.

The 14th Congress went down in the history of the Communist Party as the Congress of socialist industrialisation. *The Congress's historical decisions gave the Party and all the Soviet people the aim of making great socialist changes both in town and countryside, and of turning the country into a mighty world industrial power.*

<sup>1</sup> CPSU in Resolutions and Decisions..., Vol. 3, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

\* \* \*

Marx described revolutions as the locomotives of history. The great French bourgeois revolution at the end of the eighteenth century was just such a historical locomotive for the bourgeoisie. Revolutions in many West European countries followed. The nineteenth century saw a series of victorious bourgeois revolutions, which did away for ever with feudalism, but at the same time established capitalist rule.

The bourgeois revolutions were all revolutions of the superstructure and had a clearly defined political direction. Capitalist relations and capitalist modes of production had completely developed under feudalism. Their one aim was to bring the political superstructure into line with the economic basis. It is therefore not surprising that bourgeois revolutions culminated in the bourgeoisie seizing power. This situation means that bourgeois revolutions do not lead to decisive breaks or radical changes. They only replace one political superstructure with another, the rule of one exploiting class with another. This is also the reason that the bourgeoisie, after seizing power, turns away from the people, closes ranks with the former ruling class—princes, landowners, and nobility—and forms a single bloc against the mass of the people, the mainspring of the revolution.

Bourgeois revolutions basically reinforce private ownership of the instruments and means of production. Here the bourgeoisie makes no compromises or concessions. It is ready to fight those who encroach upon its property with fire and sword. As soon as it comes to power the bourgeoisie sets up a large state, military and police apparatus, an army, and whole armada of forces to protect its own property. Its motto is that "private property is sacred and inviolable". The bourgeoisie immediately brings in new devices to protect its rule, which is essentially the dictatorship of one class. It does not want to share power with anyone and it forms a superstructure against the people, i. e., those forces which brought it to power.

As well as a state, military and police apparatus the bourgeoisie also works out its own class ideology—a spiritual weapon to subjugate and frighten the working people. This ideology was first formulated in the declaration of the rights of man and citizen, written on the banner of the French Revolution: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." Bourgeois ideology uses these slogans stolen from the proletariat to its own ends and sows dissension in the workers' movement. It took the proletariat a long time to see through these

slogans, to realise that they were its fetters under bourgeois rule.

The bourgeoisie cunningly disguises its dictatorship and its violence with the verbal veneer of democracy, of popular government. It is not loath to play games in parliament, where as a rule the workers and peasants have no representatives, making eloquent speeches about "liberty", "equality", and "fraternity", etc. The bourgeoisie, moreover, is even willing to use such slogans as socialism, people's leadership, people's system, etc. But all this relies on the powerful administrative and military machine for suppressing the least move of the working people and especially of the proletariat.

The bourgeoisie is not content with holding sway just within the country where it comes to power. It immediately makes contact with other states, and with the bourgeoisie from these countries forms a single bloc to redraw the map of the world, subjecting all the continents and all peoples to its dominion. To use Marx's words, the bourgeoisie remakes the world in its image and likeness. But despite the bourgeoisie's aims and aspirations, it digs its own grave. A new class, created by the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, makes its appearance upon the political stage. As a class, it learns, on the one hand, from the bourgeoisie how to deal with its class opponents, and on the other, it is learning from the new social conditions in which it lives, schooling itself in the factory and the class struggle, changing from a class within itself to a class fighting for itself.

At first it acts timidly, indecisively, with no coordination or organisation. But as it develops socially it gains courage and learns to stand on its own feet. First of all it forms itself as a class, creating its own organisations from its vanguard. At first the proletariat unites in trade unions and co-operatives, and then gains force through the class revolutionary party. As it acquires this political force, the proletariat finishes forming as a class and comes forward as a threatening force, ready to do single combat with the bourgeoisie. This is the dialectic of the development of bourgeois society.

The Great October Socialist Revolution set in motion the true world history of working people and oppressed nations. Socialist revolution is always led by the proletariat with the peasantry as its ally. Just like the bourgeois revolution, its main aim is to gain power. But they can in no way be compared. The fundamental difference is that gaining power is the beginning, not the end of the proletarian revolution, the basis for further progress and consolidation.

The proletarian revolution is therefore a very profound, lengthy process, which radically transforms the old world and makes fundamental socio-economic changes. The proletariat takes power to turn private ownership of the instruments and means of production into public ones belonging to the people, to instil all workers with its ideology, to make it the ruling one, and the working people into the masters of their own fate, not to make its political rule permanent. These revolutions are differentiated not only by their nature and direction, but by the fundamental distinction between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat.

It is not violence or oppression that dominate the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the enemies of Marxism would like to prove, but genuine democracy, a political and social system which returns to the proletariat the full meaning of those slogans stolen from them by the bourgeoisie: liberty, equality, fraternity and happiness. These slogans truly reflect the ideology and aspirations of the proletariat. But it does not implement these slogans immediately. At first it must work out new forms of state, political, economic, ideological and other forms of leadership. The dictatorship of the proletariat must make profound economic changes to eliminate not only the exploiting classes, but also the reasons generating these classes. This is the essential difference between the bourgeois and socialist revolutions, between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and that of the proletariat.

Lenin applied Marx's words on revolutions being the locomotives of history to the socialist revolution with enthusiasm. His slogan was brief: to speed up the locomotive and keep it on the track. Of course, every locomotive needs not only reliable rails, but also a good driver. The Leninist Party was and continues to be that good driver. It had both to draw a plan of the track and to lay down the rails for the locomotive for the first time in history. *The Leninist Party not only speeded up the locomotive of history, but also kept it permanently on socialist rails. It has steered the locomotive up steep and difficult hills, round bends, up and down slopes.*

Lenin's teaching was crowned by his brilliant theory of the socialist revolution, that socialism could be victorious first in one or several countries. Lenin studied the imperialist phase of capitalism in detail and realised that capitalism was on its last legs and that the victory of the socialist revolution was inevitable. The October Socialist Revolution, which paved the road to the new era of socialism for mankind, proved how right this theory was.

Lenin's teaching that the weak links in the imperialist chain would gradually break away has been backed up by historical development since the October Revolution. Today these links are part of the world system which unites the socialist countries of the world.

Lenin elaborated the major problems of social development, created an ordered and consistent theory on the agrarian and national questions, and tied them in with the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for power and socialism. The scientific foundations of his work dealt a crushing blow to great-power chauvinism and bourgeois nationalism. Lenin built the world's first multinational socialist state; he laid down the theoretical and practical foundations for building the new kind of state—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Russia's working class occupies an honourable place in the heroic history of the international workers' movement. It was the first to liberate itself from the landowners and capitalists and to usher in a new era of freedom, peace and socialism for the whole of oppressed mankind. To its lot fell the great honour of being the first to fulfil its mission of liberation. Here we should note two characteristic features of the revolutionary struggle by Russia's working class and peasantry, which foreordained their victory in the struggle for power and socialism.

*The first is that the revolutionary Marxist Party, founded by Lenin, directly influenced the political formation of the Russian proletariat, its class awareness and its revolutionary training.* This party, armed with the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism and steeled in the class war, led Russia's workers' movement from the very start. It was able to merge the workers' movement with socialism into a single force, render the anti-Marxist tendencies in the workers' movement powerless, rally the Russian proletariat around it, and educate and train it in class struggle.

*The second characteristic feature was that from the very beginning of the mass revolutionary struggle Russia's working class managed to win over the peasantry and thereby gain power and provide socialism with the active support of the revolutionary peasant movement.* Russia was the first country in the history of the international workers' movement, where the working class, as the leader of the peasantry, was the predominant force of the revolution, where the Marxist-Leninist ideas on the alliance of the working class and the peasantry first became reality.

Lenin left the Party scientific plans for building socialism in one country surrounded by capitalist states. The central part of this plan was his teaching on industrialising the country, on transform-

ing agriculture along socialist lines, implementing the cultural revolution and consolidating the alliance of the working class and the peasantry, international solidarity and friendship between peoples. *The Party is proud that it has not only put Lenin's plans into practice, but also developed the theory of building socialism in one country. Lenin's true pupils have never lowered his banner, but courageously and steadfastly raised it ever higher; they have not bowed to the attacks of Leninism's many enemies, but carried this banner forward, hoisting it on the pedestal of socialism, victorious in the USSR. Communists, true followers of Lenin are the real Prometheuses of our time who have raised outdated and impoverished Russia to greatness and glory, creating the most advanced social system in the world.*

## NAME INDEX

### A

Annensky, N.-37

### B

Bakunin, M. A.-66  
Bauer, O.-352, 361  
Berdyayev, N. A.-79  
Bernstein, E.-80, 247  
Blanc, L.-227  
Bolshakov, A. M.-43  
Bonch-Bruyevich, V. D.-332, 478  
Borisov-176, 178  
Brutskus-264  
Buchež-227  
Bukharin, N. I.-403, 507  
Bulgakov, S. N.-79  
Bykhovskiy, N. Y.-295

### C

Chernov, V.-299, 300, 302  
Chernyshevsky, N. G.-58, 60, 61, 63, 64

### D

Dan-177, 178  
Danielson, N. F. (Nikolai-on)-71, 75  
David, E.-80, 247, 352  
Denikin, A. I.-398  
Diderot, D.-54  
Dobrolyubov, N. A.-60, 61

Dubasov-118  
Durnovo, P. N.-193

### E

Engelhardt, A. N.-36  
Engels, F.-15, 27, 29, 56, 57, 74-76, 83, 84, 112, 141, 159, 348, 367, 401-03, 408

### F

Feuerbach, L.-55

### G

Gabor, M.-356  
Genzel-264  
Gide, Ch.-244  
Goethe, J. W.-55  
Goremykin, I. L.-121  
Grinevetsky, V. I.-253  
Groman, V. G.-256  
Guchkov, I. V.-274  
Gusev, S. I.-96

### H

Hegel, G.-55  
Heine, H.-55  
Helvétius, C. A.-54  
Hertz, F.-80, 247, 352

Herzen, A. I. - 58, 60-63  
 Hevesy, A. - 355  
 Holbach, P. - 54

## I

Ignatiev - 192

## K

Kailensky, V. - 116  
 Kant, I. - 55  
 Kaufman, A. A. - 111, 121, 352  
 Kautsky, K. - 81, 350-52, 403  
 Kerensky, A. - 306, 327  
 Kheisin, M. L. - 239  
 Khryashcheva, A. I. - 486, 487, 489  
 Kleigels - 111  
 Knipovich, B. - 325, 344  
 Kolchak, A. V. - 398  
 Kolyupanov - 232  
 Kondratyev, N. D. - 214  
 Kovalensky, G. - 113  
 Krupp - 409  
 Kutler, N. N. - 120, 121

## L

Lassalle, F. - 93  
 Lavrov, P. L. - 66  
 Lenin, V. I. - 12-16, 22-27, 32, 34, 36-38, 41-52, 55-57, 59, 68-70, 72, 74, 77-95, 97-104, 126, 131, 133-56, 159-70, 172-74, 176-80, 183, 218, 219, 222-25, 246-49, 256, 260, 265, 269-92, 299, 300, 304, 306, 311, 312, 314-22, 325, 328, 331-33, 336, 338-46, 349, 351-63, 366, 372, 373, 378, 381, 383-90, 392-96, 398, 399, 404, 405, 408, 411, 414-16, 420, 423, 425-41, 449, 453, 454, 458, 461, 462, 468-70, 479-481, 485, 494, 501, 503, 505, 506, 512  
 Lessing, G. - 55  
 Levitsky, N. V. - 235  
 Lositsky, A. Y. - 31  
 Lunacharsky, A. V. (Voinov) - 177, 178  
 Lvov, Al. - 107, 194, 195  
 Lvov, N. N. - 274  
 Lyadov, M. N. - 176-79

## M

Makhov - 93  
 Marx, K. - 12, 13, 56, 57, 73-76, 79, 81, 83, 84, 138, 139, 157, 159, 168, 221, 246, 257, 321, 366, 367, 386, 401, 402, 461, 468  
 Maslov, P. - 94, 101, 113, 135, 176, 177, 295, 296, 302  
 Maslov, S. - 299, 302, 328  
 Merkulov, A. V. - 228, 232, 237  
 Mertvago, A. P. - 197  
 Migulin, P. P. - 120  
 Mikhailovsky, N. K. - 73, 74, 77  
 Milyukov, P. - 324  
 Mints, I. I. - 17  
 Morokhovets, Y. A. - 115  
 Moszhukhin, I. - 33, 109, 110  
 Müller, H. - 245

## N

Nishchensky, A. - 122

## O

Oganovsky, N. - 197, 199, 204, 214, 264, 302  
 Ogarev, N. P. - 62  
 Owen, R. - 226

## P

Pershin, P. N. - 210  
 Picheta, V. I. - 113  
 Piletsky, Y. - 296  
 Plekhanov, G. V. - 25, 69, 77, 78, 89, 92, 95, 96, 104, 138, 165, 169, 176-78, 294-96  
 Popov, P. I. - 214  
 Pospelov, P. N. - 17  
 Prokopovich, S. N. - 250  
 Pugachev, Ye. - 28

## R

Radishchev, A. N. - 57  
 Raiffeisen - 229  
 Razin, S. - 28  
 Romanov, (Nicholas II) - 292  
 Rousseau, J. J. - 54  
 Rozhkov, N. A. - 43, 176, 177  
 Ryazanov, N. - 94



## S

Saburov, P.-32  
Saint-Simon, A.-227  
Schelling, F.E.-55  
Schiller, J.-55  
Schmidt (Rumyantsev, P.P.)-176, 178  
Schulze-Delitzsch, H.-229  
Shiffers-111, 112  
Sirinov, M.A.-251  
Sismondi, J. Ch. L.-72  
Sorokin, P.-389  
Stalin, J. V.-277  
Stepnyak-Kravchinsky, S. M.-60, 61  
Steshinsky-119, 120  
Stolypin, P. A.-181-92, 195, 196, 198-200, 202-07,  
209-13, 218, 238, 241, 262, 280, 310, 364  
Strumilin, S.G.-176, 177, 179  
Struve, P.-79, 80  
Stumn-409

## T

Tkachev, P.-67  
Totomiants, V.-237, 240  
Trepov, D.-118, 120

Trotsky, L. D.-140-42, 150, 272  
Trubetskoi-264  
Tugan-Baranovsky, M. I.-79, 227,  
228, 231, 264

## V

Vandervelde, E.-245, 246  
Vasilchikov, A. I.-232  
Velikhov, L. A.-122  
Vollmar, G. H.-80, 247, 352  
Voltaire, F.-54  
Vorontsov, V.-71

## W

Witte, S. Yu.-118-21, 192

## Y

Yudenich, N. N.-398

## Z

Zasulich, V.-366



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